THE SPECTRUM SHOW
Magazine

DUNGEONS

MIA GAME REVIEWED

DIGITAL UPLOAD

LOADING DIGITAL FILES INTO REAL HARDWARE

FLASHBACK 86

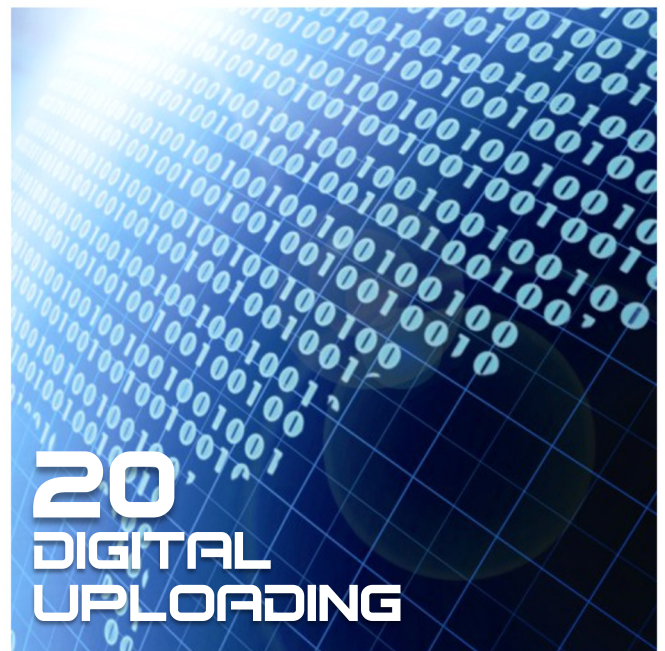GAME REVIEWS

HARDWARE

SPECIAL FEATURES

Includes material not in the video show!

PROGRESS STOPPED
Take a trip through some unfinished games.

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Send your reviews or features...

www.randomkak.blogspot.com

Welcome to issue ten and again thank you for downloading and reading this publication.

We cover not only the usual games in this issue, but also some very interesting topics. The feature on digital uploading was fun to put together for the video show, and I was also informed of another way to do this. The basic idea is getting games to load into original hardware using modern techniques, and the results were mixed.

MIA (Missing In Action) titles are also covered in this issue, with a brief outline of what they are and why they cannot be found. Some games of course are found, either by accident or by fans trawling seller sites in search of a find.

It was one such fan that found one of the famous games thought to have never been released, Judge Dread, and quickly set about bringing the downloadable file to other eager fans.

I also found myself with a MIA utility which I made available via the World Of Spectrum forums. Later I picked up a game and discovered it too was marked as MIA. That game, Dungeons, is reviewed in this issue.

MIA games are rare for many reasons, one being that the title was never actually complete, and as any game developer will tell you, this is quite normal. I have many games half complete to be found scattered about my hard drives and in this issue I start to reveal some of them to you.

It is always nice to discover things long forgotten, and this usually happens when you least expect it. I was looking for some graphics I drew so I could possibly use them in another game and by accident found a folder named Lander. Looking inside I found a game that looked about 90% complete.

The game is a mix between Lunar Lander and Thrust, and wasn't completed because, judging by the dates, another game that was similar had just been made available.

After working my way through the old code, there were a few things not complete and a few things I felt I needed to change. Some of the caves were a bit bland and there were placeholders for as yet undrawn images.

I set about fixing those and found the game to be very playable. I announced this on Twitter and put in a few hours of work to get the game mechanics right.

Then it was just tweaking some of the caves to improve layout and adding a few graphical changes.

The game is now called Deep Core Raider (see back page for advert) and if it isn't released by the time this issue goes out, it won't be far behind.

Games are the main staple of the Spectrum, but there were many other things it could do, supported by many companies and many utilities.

This series of the Spectrum Show has a section called Serious Software where I review things that are not games. I cover word processors, graphic packages and utility programs. This section will now feature in the magazine to provide a break from the games.

I think it's important to cover these things and the machine is just as capable of doing these things as any other micros at the time.

Thanks for reading and watching the show.

128 ISSUES

No sooner had Sinclair launched its much anticipated micro, the Spectrum 128, than compatibility issue began to be reported. It seems that, although Sinclair tried to keep things compatible by including a 48k mode, some games just don't work.

Several companies have admitted that some of their games will not load or crash, amongst them Firebird, Software Projects and Digital Integration. Games affected include Elite, BC Quest For Tyres and Tomahawk.

The problem seems to be an area of memory just below screen memory that Sinclair have changed on the new machine. Another issue affects the use of Kempton joystick adapters, causing several games to fail. Kempston are said to be aware of the problems and are looking into matters.

ODIN BOUGHT

British Telecom continue on their mission of buying up small software companies and amalgamating them into its growing corporate network. The most recent acquisition is Odin Computer Graphics, producers of titles like Nodes of Yesod and Robin of the Wood.

Odin will continue as a developer with BT taking exclusive rights to the software and of course, their share of the profit.

Could this be a new trend? The demise of the small independent companies, with larger cash focuses corporations taking over?

DISCOVER THE OPUS

Sinclair have been beaten in the race to produce a disk drive for the 128 machine. Clive Sinclair said last month that they would be working on one of these very shortly, but Opus have just launched their own.

The Opus Discovery provides a 3.5inch double density drive that can store 259k of data and also includes a parallel port and joystick port.

The unit will cost £149.95.

PORTABLE SINCLAIR

Sinclair have announced that their new Spectrum compatible portable computer, named the Pandora, will be delayed, and should now be available next year, 1987.

They claim production models have been made and are currently undergoing testing in several target areas, but will not be available to buy just yet.

The company are still working on which storage system to use with Clive Sinclair's Wafa technology, one of the options.

CLONE WARS

What is thought to be the first Spectrum clone has been uncovered in Brazil.

The TK90X is produced by Microdigital and is said to be fully compatible with Sinclair's machine.

The copyright laws are a bit ropey in Brazil and Microdigital say they do not have any kind of licence to actually produce the machine.

Sinclair are aware of this micro and say they will sue any company trying to import or sell the unit in the UK.

MICRO SHOOTOUT

Comparing other micros to the ZX Spectrum

Acorn Electron

Memory (RAM)	32kb
Screen Size	80 lines x 32 columns
Resolution	640 x 256 (2 clrs)
CPU	6502a @ 2Mhz
Colours	16
Sound	1 channels. 7 octaves.
Joystick Options	Via third party interface
Connections	Composite port. Cassette port. RGB port. TV. Expansion port.
Games	<600
Average Price	£175.00

ZX SPECTRUM 48K

Memory (RAM)	48kb
Screen Size	22 lines x 32 columns
Resolution	256 x 192
CPU	Z80 @ 3.5Mhz
Colours	8 + 7 bright
Sound	1 bit beeper.
Joystick Options	Via third party interface.
Connections	Tape in/out. Expansion bus.
Games	Approx. 20,000
Average Price	£175.00

Opinion

The machine to challenge the Spectrum was scuppered right from the start by delays in manufacturing, meaning it missed the critical Christmas markets. The specification looks great, and this surprised me, beating the Speccy on most things. More colours, RGB output, better keyboard, a choice of display modes and all at a competitive price.

The sound was similar to the Spectrum and games were loaded via tape, so what went wrong? It was a popular machine costing less than it's bigger brother the BBC. The games were good although some chose to use low res modes and terrible colours, and there was only 20k of usable RAM.

A good machine then, that should have more recognition.

Count Duckula, if you didn't know, is a game based on the poplar kids cartoon of the same name from way back in 1988.

Count Duckula and his chums, Igor and Nanny, have transported themselves back to the land of the pharaohs in search of a mystical saxophone. It doesn't say why they wanted to find this instrument other than it possesses magical powers. Strange because I don't think the saxophone was around in Egyptian times.. but the very first episode on television was titled *No Sax Please Were Egyptian* – the same sub title of this game.. so I guess they used the plot for the game...

And.. back to the game, Duckula starts at the base of the pyramid, and sets off to explore. Within the pyramid are doors that require keys, and these are scattered about in various rooms.

There are also several objects that are needed to allow him to get past certain points of the game. These are a death mask, a sandbag and a hammer, and again these are to be found in various rooms.

The map is pyramid shaped, which helps navigation, and the panel at the bottom of the screen indicates how many keys you have at the right hand side, and the objects you are carrying at the left.

There is a clock that slowly ticks up, and this increments if you come into contact with a mummy, bat, falling rock or one of the Crow brothers that can be found climbing about.
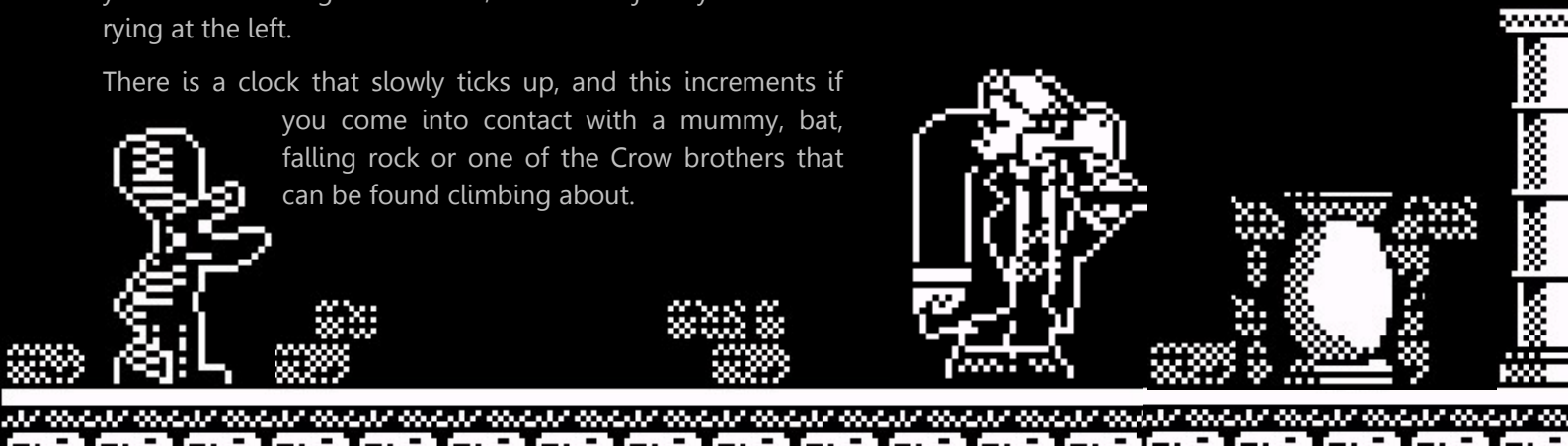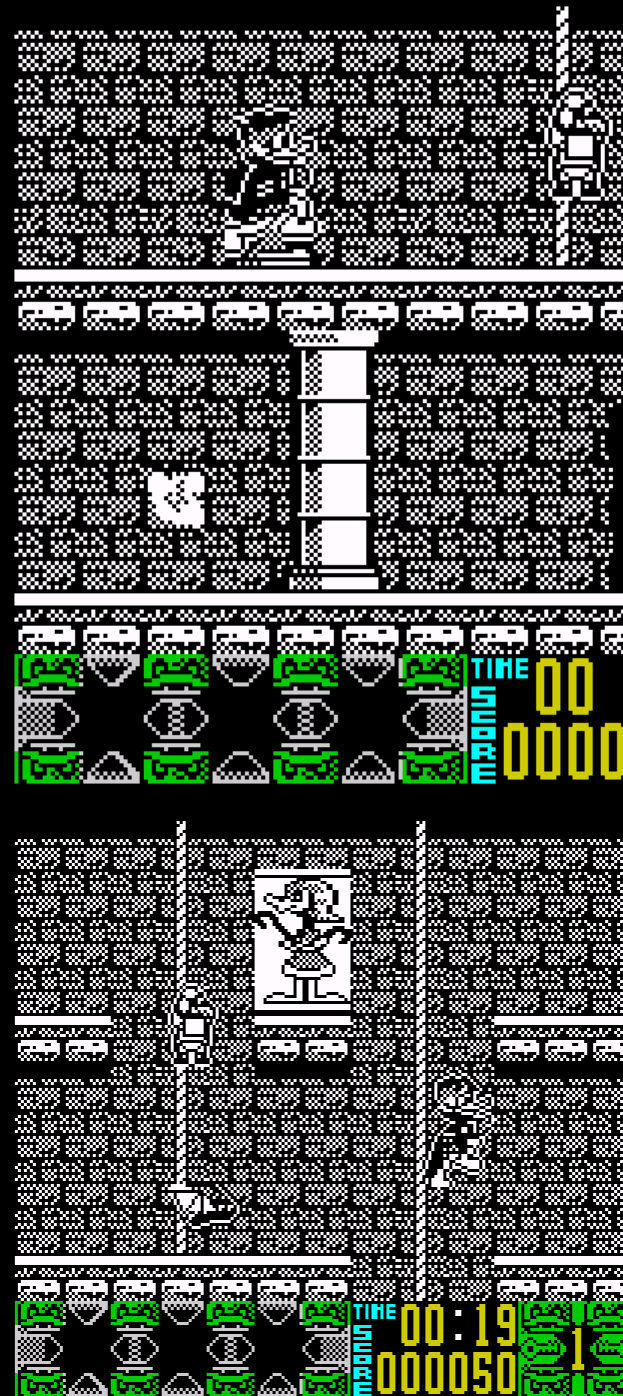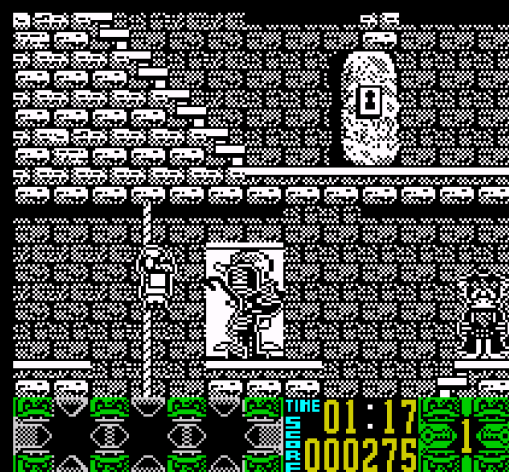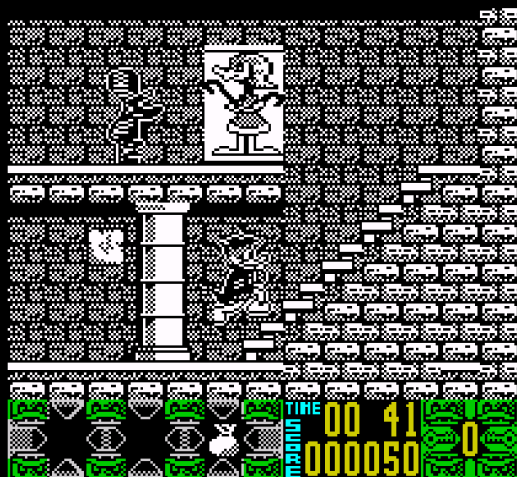
The time limit given for the quest is 12 hours, but you get extra time if you collect a Ankh, again just found laying about. If Igor appears, he will also give Duckula more time. If Nanny appears, she can smash down doors meaning the count does not need a key, but I never saw her during my numerous games.

The graphics are large, nicely drawn and smooth, and the use of monochrome means there is no colour clash, although it can sometimes be hard to see things.

The use of flip screen can also be problematic, especially at the top of stairs and it can take a few seconds to actually locate our hero on a new screen.

Dukula has no weapons, so he has to jump over things or avoid them. Jumping is a bit strange in that he actually does make contact but as long as he is jumping, there is no penalty.

So Count Duckula is a standard arcade adventure. As far as those types of game go, this isn't too bad, but it's quite short and can be completed in around six minutes once you know where all the keys and items are.

Sound is a bit of a let-down, as the game is pretty much silent. You get the odd blip sound when you pick up a key, but that's all.

Difficulty is easy, but I suppose this was targeted at the younger game player, although it does make a change for me to be able to get quite far into this type of game without running out of energy or dying.

All in all then, a decent, if short, arcade adventure.

Give it a try.
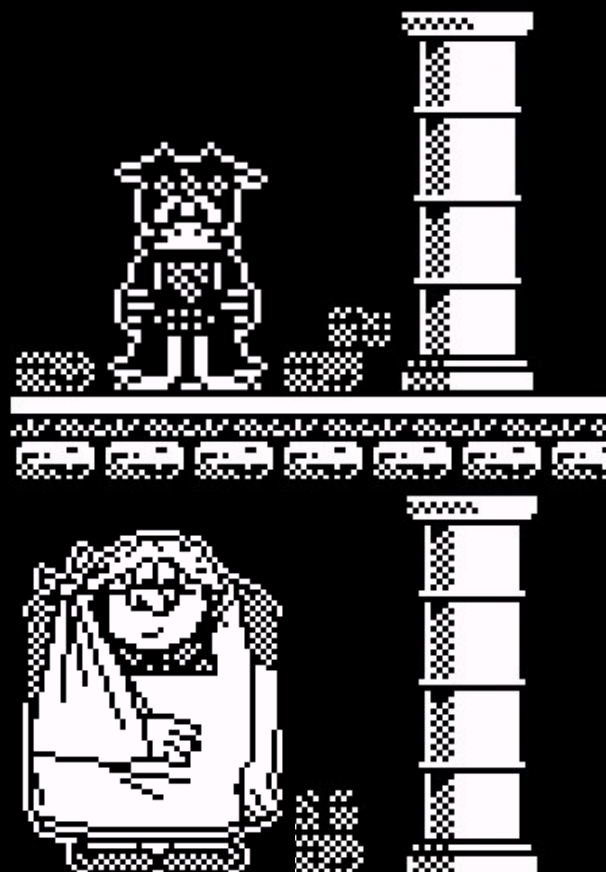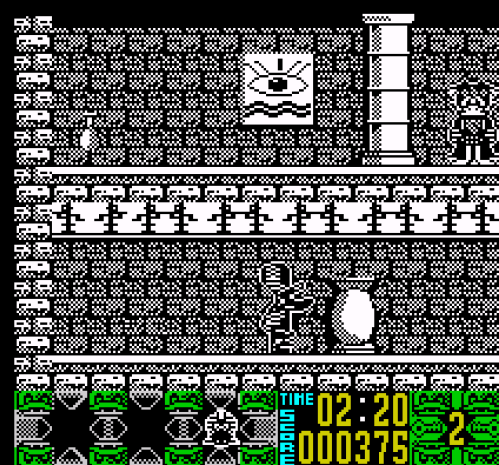
ALL OR NOTHING Abbex 1984

All Or Nothing sees you parachuting into an enemy camp trying to locate and steel some secret files. You only have ten minutes to do this, so time is of the essence. To help you keep time you must find your watch, this will tell you how long is left.

To get the secret files you have to first enter the office and crack a four digit code. This will give you a key and a gun. This key will open one of the 9 warehouses, in which you will find other useful items like ammunition or radio transmitters and the key to the next warehouse. In the last warehouse will be the secret files, but obviously you have to get through the others first, all the time keeping out of the way of the guards and their dogs.

You can shoot guards and search them, this may turn up other useful items like ID cards that give you immunity for a short period of time. You can also gas them, which sounds like bad taste, but it only stuns them and allows you to search them. You can create diversions by using explosives too.

Controls are a little awkward, sometimes not responding causing you to get stuck and allow guards to close in. You have to rotate left and right and then use the forward key to move, rather like Ant Attack, only less responsive. Other keys allow you to select an item and to use it.

Doing things takes time, so for instance when trying to open a door, you have to wait a few seconds, during which the guards and dogs can attack you.

The graphics are in 3D, and scroll in character squares. The playing area is not too big to make things difficult but the guards and dogs are bit basic and the player only has two frame of animation. The colours are a bit strange, why is the ground magenta? Surely it should have been Green or Yellow, or even black and have the game played at night..

The sound is limited to a few clicks and beeps when you try a door or get shot, which is bit disappointing. If you pass behind a wall or building, the viewing angle changes automatically, which although is nice, it can cause confusion.

The game in general is not too bad and had the controls been more responsive, it would have been better. Because of the time limit the action has to be continuous which gives it an edge.

Overall, not a bad game for 1984, and the 3D view made sure it scored well in magazines. For me though the idea was better than the execution and the waiting for actions to happen ruin the game flow.

Don't let that stop you from trying it though.

RACE FUN

Rabbit Software 1983

1983 witnessed a whole mass of games being released for what was then, a brand new computer. The market, by mid 1983, was flooded with every arcade clone you could think of and a plethora of unique and original games. Many of the early ones were, to be polite, little more than glorified type-ins.

Race Fun falls midway between arcade clone and early, not so good release. We shouldn't really judge early games, because at the time, every release, with very few exceptions, reached the same standards, but more about that later.

So, what we have here then is a race game with very simple rules. The faster you go the more points you get. Hitting anything reduces your fuel and so you points.

We have a speedometer and fuel gauge on the left and the track on the right. The track scrolls down the screen in 8 pixel jumps, starting off straight and wide, but soon becoming narrow and winding.

There are other cars on the track too, that you have to avoid or you lose fuel. Once your fuel runs out, the game ends.

The simple, top-down graphics also move in 8 pixel jumps, which makes the game challenging when things start to move quickly and the road is only wide enough for two cars.

The engine sound is fine, and there is what I think is a tyre-squealing sound whenever you move left or right.

The controls are just left, right, accelerate and brake, but you can't press more than one key at a time, so you can't accelerate and move right, this makes it very tricky to play and often causes you to crash into cars or the sides of the road.

It's a simple game for a simple era in the Spectrum's history. There were many type-in games that played exactly like this one and there is nothing here that stands out above the crowd. The author, John Cain, went on to better things, like Booty for example, but in these early days, he was learning just like everyone else.

The market was booming and things were moving fast.
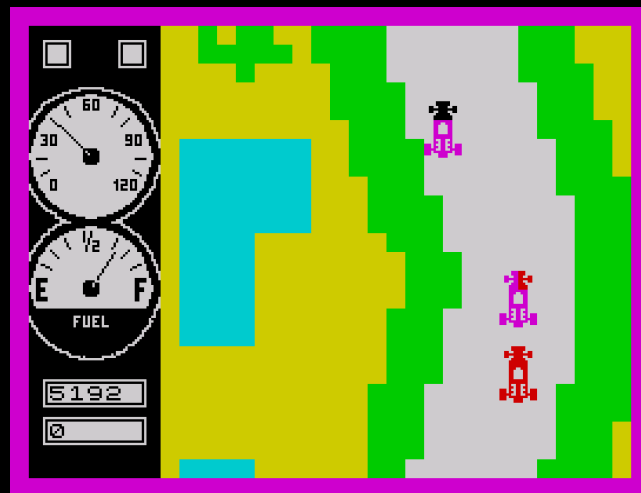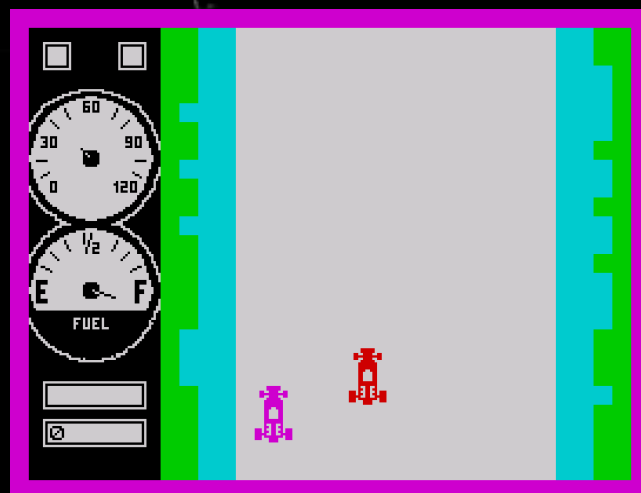
In early 1983, this was a typical example of what to expect from games, by the end of 1983 we had the likes of the early Ultimate games, Android 2, Ant Attack, 3D Death Chase, Manic Miner, Pogo, and more...

So, what we have here is an early example of a racing game that's fun to play a few times but has little depth or re-playability...

MINI OFFICE

Database Software 1985

Anyone starting a small business, or wanting to use their Spectrum for a bit of serious work, the three basic requirements are a word processor, a spreadsheet and a database.

The Spectrum had a variety of these in different packages, but Database Software decided to produce an all-in-one package, containing all of these plus a graphics program, and named it Mini Office.

With so much included, there had to be a manual, and the one that comes with it is small, it's almost miniaturised, but it does cover the basics to get you started.

```
      WORD PROCESSOR OPTIONS
BREAK.Return to these options.
   1...Large letter editing mode.
   2...Small letter editing mode.
   3...Print text file.
   4...Set tab key.
   5...Save text file.
   6...Verify text file.
   7...Load text file.
   8...Display editing functions.
   9...Change character set.
   0...Clear text file.
```

Word Processor

The main menu provides several basic controls including changing the character set, editing in large or small text mode, loading, saving and printing. It's all very sparse, but I suppose it does the job.

Once in the edit mode you can type away, and the program displays the word count and remaining memory. There is a basic copy function and a page layout that is limited to 32 characters only. This can be a problem if you are trying to work out how the document will look when printed.

Yes it's a very basic word processor, and probably something you could make using BASIC if you had a few hours. It is though, a quick and dirty option that comes with other business tools

```
   TIME      WORDS      FREE
   1:15        26       29773

   START
Hello and welcome to this short
review of Mini Office from
Database Software.

The package, although basic,
will suite the begginer and does
offer basic tools.

   END
```

Database

Once loaded the main menu looks simple enough, allowing you to create a new database, load or save an existing database or do various things like searching or listing.

Setting up a database is very easy; you are guided through the process step by step with prompts for how many fields you want (up to a maximum of 12), field names, field types (which can be a string or a number) and finally the field length. Once you have set this, you can begin entering data.

Depending on how many fields you used and how long each field is, you are obviously limited to a maximum number of records, and this is displayed from the main menu.

Adding records is fast and easy. You are given each field name and simply enter the data you want.

```
            M E N U

   <A>   LOAD OLD FILE
   <B>   SETUP NEW FILE
   <C>   ADD RECORDS
   <D>   FIELD SUMMARY
   <E>   MODIFY RECORD
   <F>   LIST RECORDS
   <G>   FIELD SEARCH
   <H>   REPLACE FIELD
   <I>   MULTI-FIELD SORT
   <J>   SAVE CURRENT FILE
   <K>   END PROGRAM

    1 RECORD(S) ENTERED

 MAXIMUM OF 336 RECORDS

      SELECT OPTION
```

Once you have some data you can then use the other functions.

Searching allows you to locate text in the selected field, but is case sensitive, which is a bit of a pain. The program differentiates from KONG, kong and Kong.

You can also sort your fields and list them to screen or printer.

Like the word processor, it's very basic but does the job. Being limited to around 300 records could restrict its use though.

Spreadsheet

The first task is to load or create a file. You are asked for the number of columns and rows, which is unusual, but I suppose makes sense with limited memory. You then get the half familiar spreadsheet view. Here the columns already have data in the form of numbers.

Next you would probably want to setup column headings, this is where things get messy. First you move to the column, then press C and then enter the name. You have to do this for each column too.

Once done you can add simple formulas and copy them to other fields by using the D and Z keys. There is no option to enter text into the fields, it is purely for calculating numbers which is a bit of a let down.

The program is clunky to use but does it's job, I suppose like the rest of the programs. It can be slow if you have a lot of columns, but we are talking about a Spectrum here.

Graphics

The graphics program allows you to load in your saved spreadsheets and produce graphs. You are asked which field you want to include and then are given various options to display the data.

This isn't actually that bad and certainly helps to visualise the data in your spreadsheet. There are three types of graphs which can be viewed or printed, and you can also view the data being used.

So, overall then a pretty basic offering that would suite a beginner, but the lack of features would rule it out for the serious users.

I suppose it was aimed at the younger end anyway, and for fairly basic operations, it does the job.
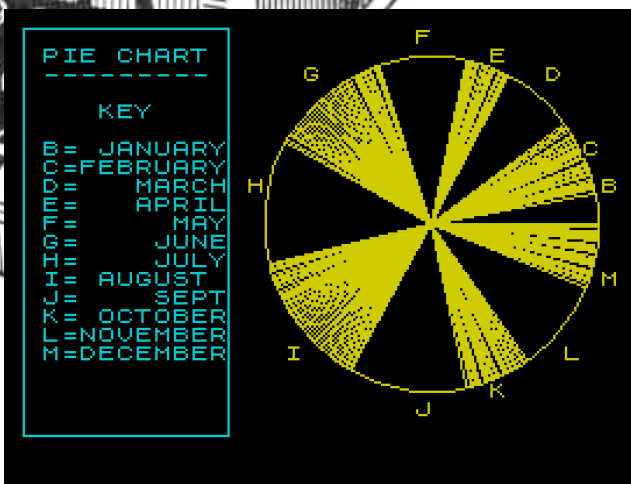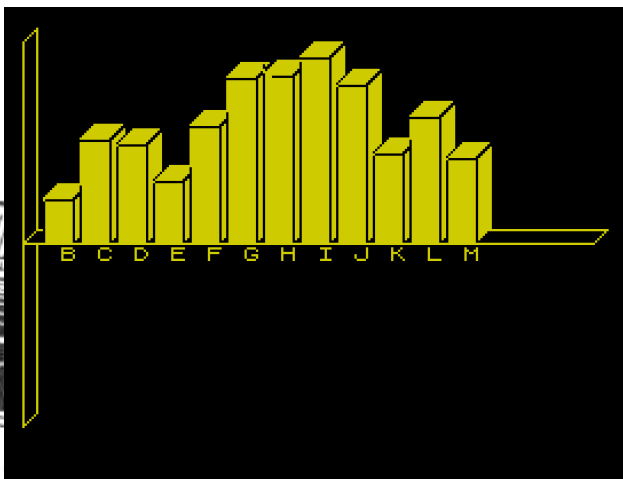
MISSING IN ACTION

The games promised but never delivered

Missing In Action titles refer to games or other programs that, despite being advertised and available at the time, have somehow slipped through the net and are no longer available. There could be many reasons for them not to have turned up after all these years, the most common being that only a relatively few were ever sold.

As time marches on and the kids of the eighties grew up, got married, moved house, got divorced and generally got on with life, their old games were either left behind after a house move, or taken to the rubbish tip to make room for things deemed more important.

When the interest in retro gaming exploded, sometime back in the late nineties, these games became the holy grail for some, tracking down authors and old friends, placing adverts in newspapers and when online sites such as eBay arrived, avidly watching for any new listings.

Of course in the very early days, finding a MIA game was quite easy, as no one else was looking and the archives on the web consisted of the easily to get titles. The archives were also not managed to the extent they are today, with duplicate titles and miss-named titles causing some MIA games to go unseen for years.

In the early 2000's I contributed a fair few myself, as

my friends dumped their dusty collections onto me instead of throwing them away.

Now though, it is far more difficult, and to see a new one being recovered is an exciting event.

The process of recovering a title is not straight forward and can be almost impossible. The cassette or disc may have been in a damp garage for 25 years, and reading the data is problematic.

When I set about recovering one particular game, I believe it was Lancer Lords by Rabbit Software, the tape was in a very bad way. There were audio drop outs and volume changes all over the place. I took digital samples from both sides of the cassette and replaced the drop out sections, luckily they were in different places on each side. I then
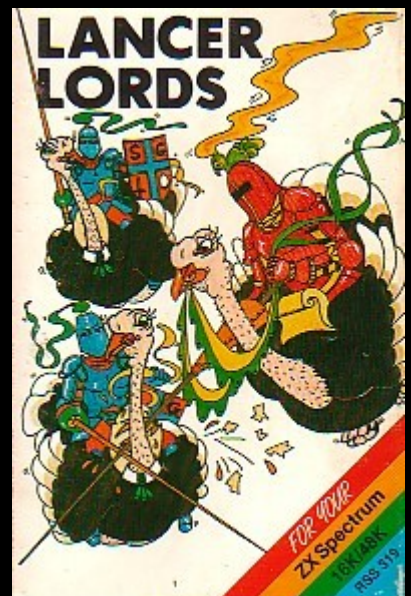
Still Missing...

Atomic Robo-Kid (Activision)
Advertised. Demo released. Scrapped.

Star Trek - Rebel Universe (Beyond)
Advertised. Never released.

Automan (BugByte)
Advertised. Never released.

Cyborg (CRL)
Advertised. Never released.

Scooby Do (Elite)
Advertised. Scrapped. Re-written.

Bandersnatch (Imagine)
Advertised. Never released.

Comic Bakery (Imagine)
Advertised. Never released.

High Noon (Ocean)
Advertised. Never Released.

Great Giana Sisters (Rainbow Arts)
Advertised. Previewed. Withdrawn.

Hunchback at the Olympics (SW Projects)
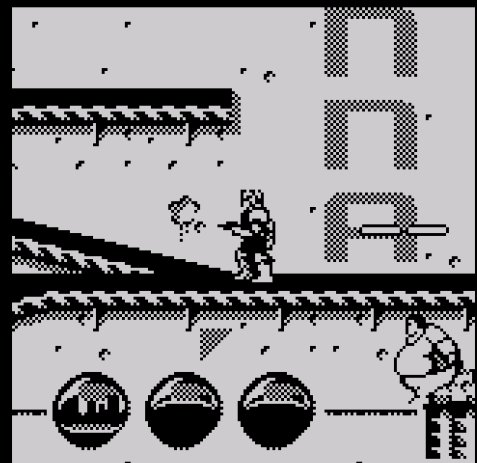Advertised. Never released?

Solar Jetman (Ultimate)
Advertised. Previewed. Never released.

And many more....

lifted the volume where required before finally loading into an emulator and re-building the loader. A quick run through a converter and I had a fully working version TAP file ready for upload.

There are people on World Of Spectrum who have become expert at this process, and it is often better to send any MIA to them rather than trying yourself. Twenty five year old tape is easily damaged meaning the game could be lost forever.

Judge Dread (Virgin)

The game was advertised across multiple platforms including the Spectrum, but distribution was limited. Some think it was never released until it was found recently.

Missing In Action

A full list of all currently known MIA titles is available on World Of Spectrum, but with work on going and the WOS archive currently not being updated, I recommend you check the forums first.

It is not always the lesser known titles that get found too. In July 2014, forum member gorski posted that he had obtained a copy of Judge Dread by Virgin Games. It was commonly thought the game was never actually released, or even fully completed. He dumped the contents of the disc to emulator format and provided scans of the box and contents.

Some games will never be found sadly, not because they didn't sell, but because they never existed, or were never completed. Games that spring to mind include Toki, Great Giana Sisters and the infamous Solar Jetman from Ultimate Play The Game.

TOKI

The game was advertised across multiple platforms including the Spectrum.

Crash magazine previewed it in July 1991.

What happened to it?

Software companies often advertised the same game across multiple platforms, so to save having to produce different versions of the advert, they used the same one listing all formats the game would be released on. Sometimes though, this was optimistic to say the least.

As MIA recovery got more publicity via the forums and internet, more people began looking through their collections and more games came to light. Game authors also got in on the act, searching their attics for development discs.
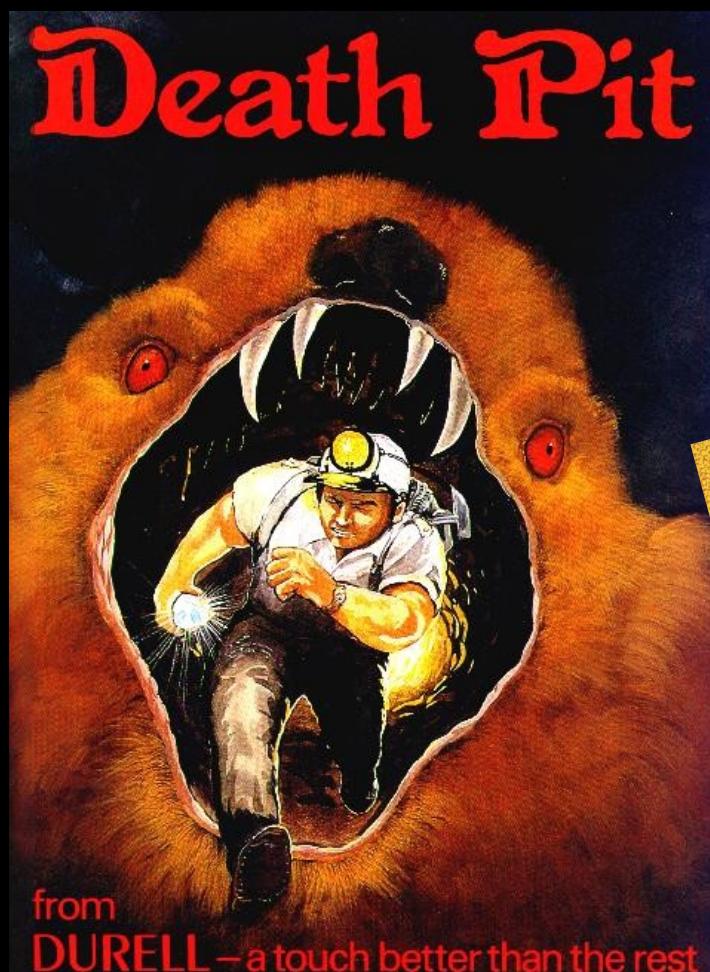
CASE FILE: SCOOBY DO
PUBLISHER: ELITE SYSTEMS

Rumours started to circulate about Scooby Do around September 1985, with Eilte Systems boasting it would be the first ever Computer Cartoon.

Crash magazine did a preview in October of the same year showing some outstanding graphics.

C&VG briefly mentioned it the following month, November.

December arrived and Elite had to come clean and confirm the game would not be released as they had simply run out of memory. Instead the licence would be handed to Gargoyle Games to produce a totally different game.
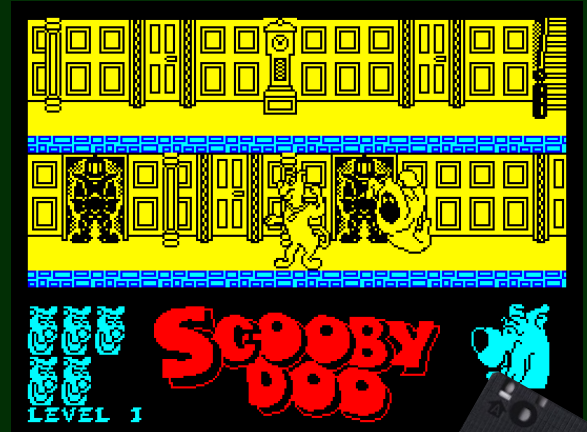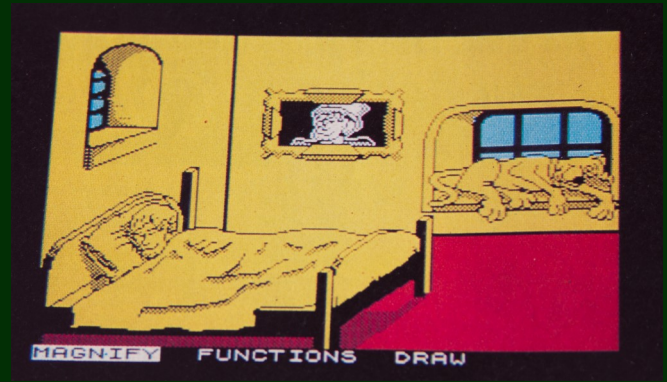
Death Pit from Durrell Software was another high profile game thought to be lost. It was cancelled at the very last minute despite heavy advertising. The games author, Clive Townsend located the development discs in 2007 and brought the game to public.

Another thing to remember is that in the later part of the Spectrum's life, games were released on multiple media. Just because there is a tape version in the archives, doesn't m e a n the disc version is MIA. There has been many such games recovered.

It is not just games either, many peripherals were sold across many years, and the software changed as it got updated. Datel had at least two versions of their Lightwriter software, only the later one being available in the archives. The earlier version I have, and it was featured in Episode 37. I will be uploading this once the WOS updates are functioning again.
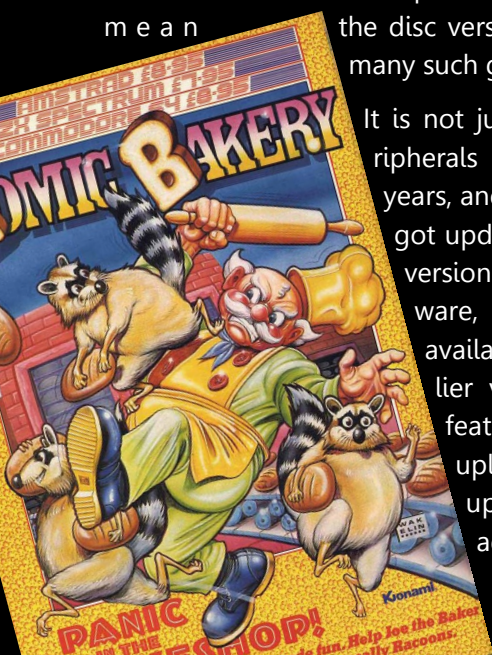
Recently Recovered

International 3D Tennis (Disc version)

007 Trans-Master (Disc version)

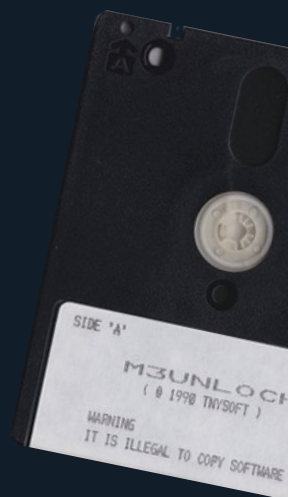Family Pack 1

Enigma

M3 Unlock (Disc version)

Ringo

Pirate

Mail Master + Text Master

Judge Dread

Touch Type

Discovery

Jack The Ripper (CRL Disc version)

DUNGEONS

Calisto 1983

Dungeons is a bit of a strange game, for many reasons. The main one being that it is listed as Missing In Action in the World Of Spectrum archives, meaning no known copies exist. That should make it quite rare, however a copy does exist because I've got one.

After converting it to a working TAP and TZX file, I loaded the game up to see what I thought the Spectrum world hadn't seen for over twenty years.

You portray a mercenary out to clean up areas of evilness, and your goal is to earn 12,000 experience points and find the Baron's magic weapons, these are a sword, a shield and armour.. hang on though.. are shields and armour technically weapons? Any way.. to the game..
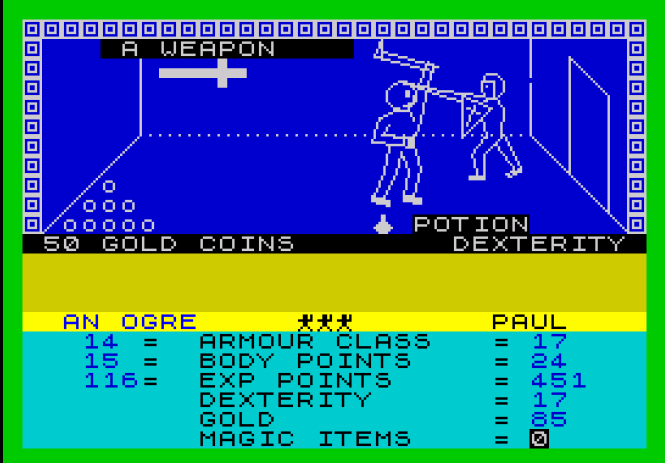
You start off with an overview of controls and once the game loads and you enter a name for your character.

The lower area of the screen holds your stats including lives, armour class and gold. These need to be monitored as they increase or decrease each time to encounter a monster, trap or potion.

The top half shows your map view. Here you can move about and try to find rooms that may hold gold. You can also see various monsters, traps and potions. If you wait around on this screen too long the monsters will start to chase you. You can move to a different screen with a different wall layout by simply exiting through one of the gaps in the outer wall.

If you get to a room, identified by red and white blocks, you can ask questions before you enter. What is in the room and are there any traps. It is then up to you if you want to enter or not.

Entering a room will trigger the trap, if there was one present, and you sometimes get to parry any projectiles

A WEAPON

85 GOLD COINS   HEALING
PRESS   KEY H= HEAD   TO BLOCK
           KEY B= BODY   OR
           KEY L= LEG   ATTACK
A VAMPIRE   ✗✗✗   PAUL
   10 =   ARMOUR CLASS   = 18
   15 =   BODY POINTS   = 30
   146 =   EXP POINTS   = 100
          DEXTERITY   = 17
          GOLD   = 0
          MAGIC ITEMS   = ⊘

POTION

by choosing high, mid or low blocks. If there are any monsters present, then a fight will ensue.

You will also fight monsters in the maze should you bump into any of them, and at this pint the screen changes. Here you can see yourself and the monster drawn in wire frame graphics along with any treasure or weapons.

The fights are turn based and you can choose to hit the monster in the head, body or legs. If they block, then there is no damage... if they block incorrectly you inflict damage and reduce their armour.

When the monster takes its turn, you can then try to block the same three places and the same rules apply. The fight continues until one is the victor.

If you win, you get to keep whatever is in the room, your stats are added to and to continue your quest. Back in the maze.

The monsters all look the same and the animation is pretty poor but does its job of showing the action. Sound is just simple BEEPS and yes you can really tell that this game is entirely written in BASIC. That is not to say it's a poor game as it does not require fast moving sprites or impressive sounds.

MONSTER   ✗✗✗   PAUL
      =   ARMOUR CLASS   = 17
      =   BODY POINTS   = 22
      =   EXP POINTS   = 451
          DEXTERITY   = 16
          GOLD   = 85
          MAGIC ITEMS   = ⊘

There are options to save the game, as this could take a long time to complete. Despite the flaws, it's not too bad to play once you get the hang of it but it's all a bit un-inspiring. Walk around a maze, fight monsters, repeat. Some fights can take quite a while to complete, others take only a single hit, it all depends on the stats of you and the monster.

After the excitement of the first few fights though it all gets repetitive and you end up just wanting to die so you can move on and play something else..

One for dungeon crawling fans only.

If you play new games you probably know Denis Grachev. He created many interesting games for Spectrum for example, Gravibots, Alter Ego and its sequel Dreamwalker.

One of the titles Denis Grachev released in 2014 was Multidude, a puzzle game where cooperation is essential.

You control a team of 2 or 3 characters and have to guide them to the exit on each screen. Each character has his own abilities - one can fly, the other can push blocks, a third can make holes in a floor etc. Using these abilities correctly is a key to the success.

There are 30 puzzles to be solved. Every puzzle is a single screen with platforms, ladders, walls and other objects like blocks and spikes. There is a specific team of characters in each puzzle but sometimes you can find little dolls that change one character into another.

Controlling the characters is easy - left, right, up, down to move them and fire to change active "dude". There is no time limit,, which is a good thing, so you don't have to be quick.

When one of characters dies don't worry because you have unlimited number of lives. When you are stuck you can press R and current puzzle will start again.

Difficulty level isn't high, I've finished the game and the only puzzle I had problems with was the last one.

Multidude uses the Nirvana engine, so the graphics are very colourful. They are also well drawn (all characters are easily recognizable) and animated. Sound quality depends on the version you are playing: there are good effects and in-game music in the AY version and poor effects and no in-game music in the beeper version.

I enjoyed playing this game but in my opinion it's too short. Another 30 puzzles could be a good idea. If you are looking for an interesting game for one or two evenings try this one.
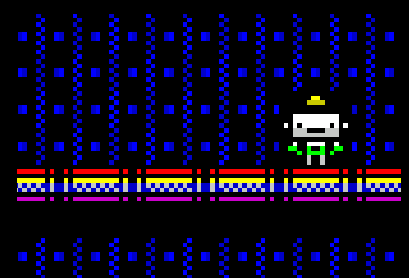
Review by: Piotr "PopoCop" Szymanski
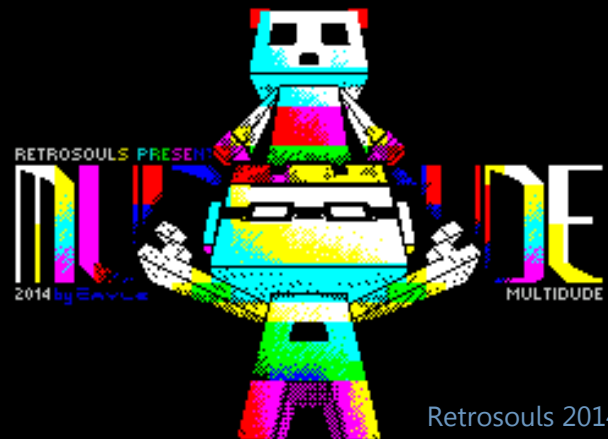
Retrosouls 2014
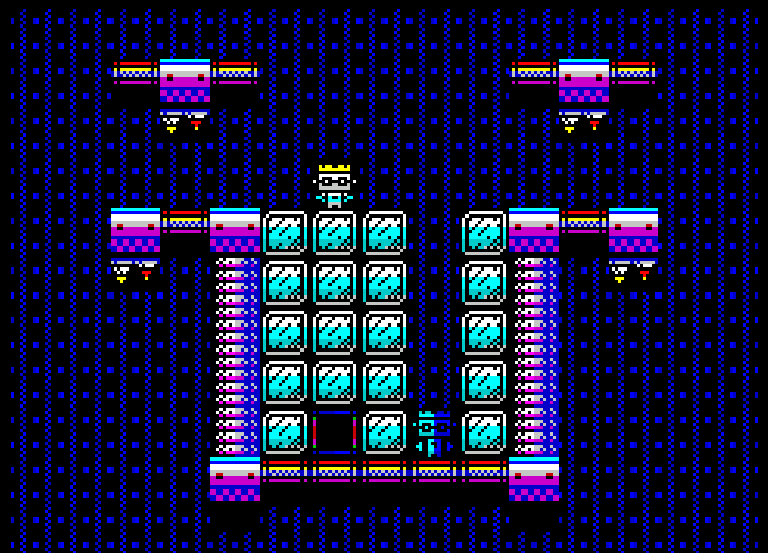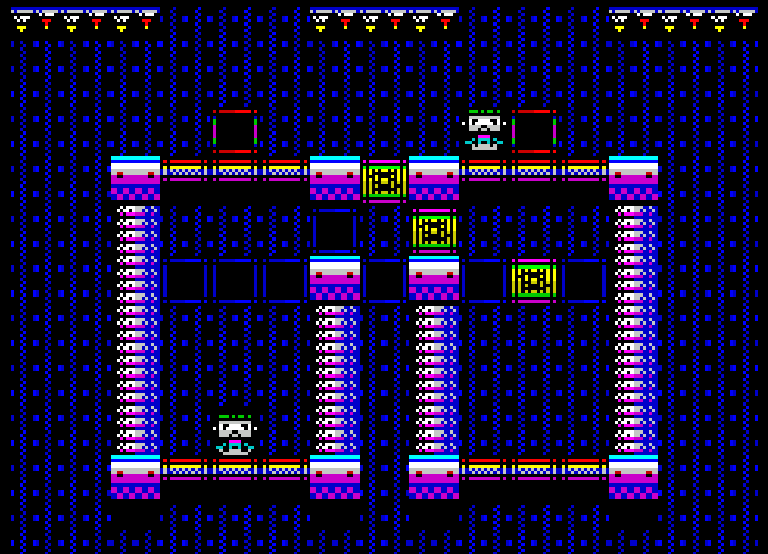
The Nirvana Engine gives more colours per character square.

POOL

Bug Byte 1983

This early 16K game depicts the game of pool from above, and is it interesting to see how with such limited memory, the ball mechanics would work.

You can play with another person, taking turns, or just play the single player version, either way the game works the same. There is a view from direct-ly above the table, and you begin with the cue ball and six numbered balls. All of the balls are the same colour though, which is a bit of shame.

A small crosshair indicates where the shot will be aimed at, and a power meter continually steps up through five stages. To take a shot you move the crosshair anywhere on the table, using the cursor keys, and not just around the table edges. Once in position, you wait for the power meter to reach the desired level, and then press S to take the shot.

The ball physics are quite good, but the big disap-pointment is the lack of sound. Every things is played out in silence. I know the game is only 16K, but a small click sound on impact could have been fitted in somewhere, especially when you consider the actual size of the game code is only 6K.

The rules of this version differ from real Pool, so seasoned players beware. You have three lives and a life is lost of you take three shots without potting a ball or you pot the cue ball.

If this happens, the table is reset, meaning you lose any balls you may have positioned ready to clear up.

When a ball is potted, you are told the score, which is ten times the ball number, and your cross hair is reset back to the top left. This wastes a lot of time and it would have been better to either leave it were it was, or set it to the centre of the-table.

When I started playing this, the lack of sound started to get to me, so I put on some music. This
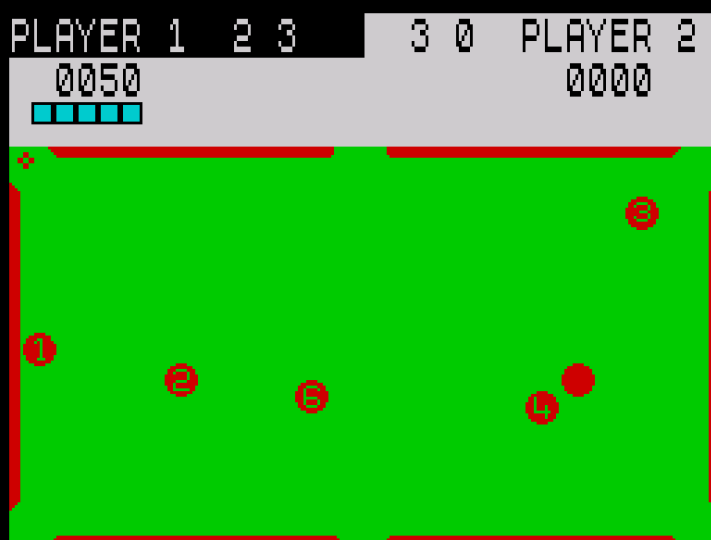
made a difference, and I spent over an hour playing this game.

As I played more, my accuracy got better, but at times it was still better to blast the cue ball around and hope for a fluke shot. This happened quite often, which was great.

Overall, it's a real pity about the sound, but this game isn't bad once you get into it.

FEATURE

DIGITAL UPLOAD

LOADING DIGITAL GAMES INTO REAL HARDWARE

Emulators are great. They let you run your favourite games without having to faff about setting up your Spectrum, plugging the leads in, tuning in the television and rewinding tapes. Files can be loaded instantly, progress can be saved at any point, cheats can be entered, the game can be paused, and it's just so much more convenient.

I can remember my first Speccy emulator, Z80 by Gerton Lunter, running on my state of the art 486 DX4 100. It was amazing to play Jetpac again, not to mention my old games I had written back in the 80's.

With that said, there are many people who like to use real hardware, myself included. I enjoy playing on either emulation on or the real thing, but there is something about using the real hardware, whichever machine you prefer. In fact I have a plus 2 permanently setup with my divIDE next to my PC.

For those real hard-core fans though, loading the games as they were intended, by tape, is the only way to experience the Spectrum. The problem is, unless you have a large collection of original games, using the Spectrum this way can be tricky, not to mention time consuming. So, in this feature I am going to take you through three options to download games from the internet and load them into your real Spectrum, sometimes much faster than the original tape.

I have tested many utilities to do this over the years, and the options I present here are, in my experience, the easiest and best choices. That is not to say they are faultless.

K7ZX

K7ZX is a small utility that allows you to convert digital files into various formats including MP3 and WAV. It will also allow you to play the file direct, mimicking a tape recorder. K7ZX can be downloaded from World of Spectrum.

You will of course require the game of your choice in TAP or TZX format. For these tests I am using Atic Atac, but any game file will do.

Set up your trusty Spectrum and connect an audio lead to the headphone socket of your computer and the other end to the ear socket of the Spectrum. For this try both stereo and mono leads. Sometimes things work better with mono, sometimes not.

Once ready and everything is turned on, load up K7ZX.

Navigate to your game and select it. This will enable the various options and buttons on the interface.

Set your Spectrum to load in the normal way and

click the PLAY button on the K7ZX interface.

If your volume is OK, the game should now load straight into your Spectrum. You may have to experiment with volume to get it right, but you had to do this with the real thing anyway.

This method will load the game at real speed. So for Atic Atac this take about 4 minutes 18 seconds.

Once loaded, you can enjoy using the real hardware. For those who don't want to wait that long there is a better option. You can use the next method to turbo load games in a fraction of the time.

OTLA

I know K7ZX can turbo load, but I found OTLA much less error prone. Again OLTA can be downloaded from World Of Spectrum.

It is a very similar tool to K7ZX but with more things to tweak and play with. I would suggest leaving things as they are initially though.

Keeping everything plugged in as it was for the previous method, load up OTLA.

Click the Add Blocks button and locate your game and click OK. The file has to be a TAP file. When asked which blocks to load, just click OK.

Set the option to indicate which model of Spectrum you are using.

Now, set you Spectrum to load again.

And click the PLAY button.

If your volume is OK the game will now turbo load.
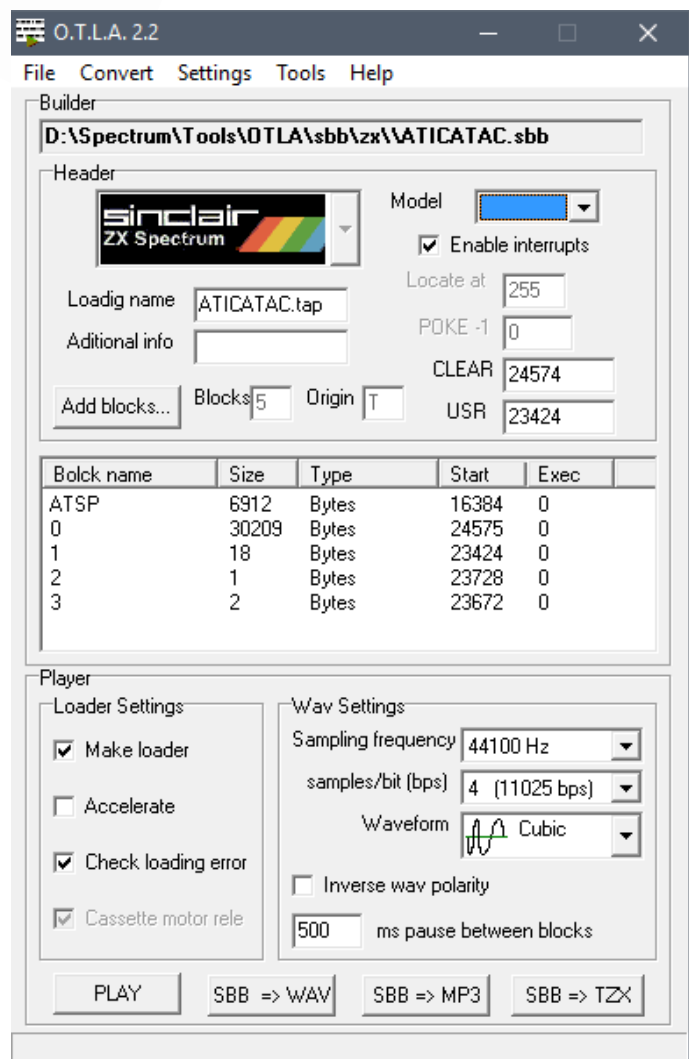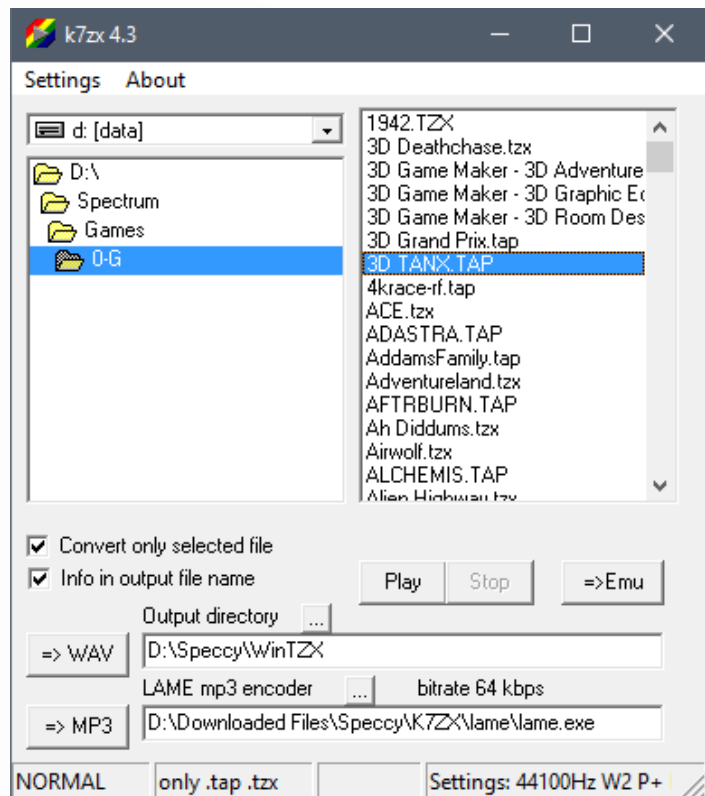
DIGITAL UPLOAD

The speed increase is quite remarkable, reducing Atic Atac from 4min 18 secs to just 31 seconds on the default settings.

If you have problems, you can then begin to tweak things like the sample rate, sample frequency and wave pattern. For me, most games loaded with the default settings. Some games will not work at all due to timing issues or protection methods, so it can be a bit of trial and error.

I love this way of loading games, I think it's good mix of old school and modern.

But, for the true purist, nothing will replace real tapes.

Real Tapes

This method involves using K7ZX again.

Instead of loading the game directly into your Spectrum, you simply need to pull the lead out of your Spectrum and insert it into the mic socket of your cassette recorder.

Select the game as before.

Press record on your cassette recorder.

Click the PLAY button. and the game will be recorded onto the tape.

Once finished, you should now be able to load the game straight from the tape, just like the old days, with plenty of time to make a drink of tea while you wait.

You can also use this method to make MP3's of your games and load them onto your phone or MP3 players. Having tried several devices though, I could not get any games to load using this method. I suspect you would have to edit the file and increase the volume until you got things working.

The Fourth Option

Since this feature was written and released on the show, another option has been brought to my attention, but to use it you will need Sinclair's Interface One.

This method uploads a snapshot from your PC directly into the Spectrum via the Interface One's serial port.

Before you can do this you will need to build yourself a serial lead. The pin-outs are not standard and you can find them either in the Interface One manual or the documents of Spectaculator, the popular emulator.

Now you have a lead, and hopefully a serial port on your PC, you will need the software. ZX-trans is a command line program written by George Beckett.

https://sites.google.com/site/ connectedzxspectrum/home

You have to configure your PC's serial port to 8N1 with hardware flow control.

With all this in place the last you need is a file to transfer, and this can be in Z80, SNA or SZX format. SZX files tend to be smaller and therefore faster to transfer.

Once all that is ready and things are connected and switched on you prepare your Speccy using:

FORMAT "b",19200

This sets Interface One to the correct baud rate for it's binary port.

Then use the binary load command:

```
D:\Spectrum\Tools\ZXtrans>zxtrans -i -s COM1 -f 0 -b 19200 -v jp.szx
Using libspectrum Version 1.1.1
Serial interface is based on libserialport Version 0.1.0
Input snapshot is 7859 bytes long
Found snapshot for Spectrum 48K
Successfully opened serial port COM1
Using single-byte IF1 loader
Writing 73 bytes of Z80 Set State information to COM1
Writing memory page 5 information to COM1
Writing memory page 2 information to COM1
Writing memory page 0 information to COM1

D:\Spectrum\Tools\ZXtrans>_
```

LOAD *"b"

Don't forget the asterix before the quotes.

In the command line, navigate to the folder containing ZX-Trans (and your game file to make things easy) and enter:

 zxtrans -s <port_name> -b 19200 -i <snapshot>

<port_name> is the COM port you are using, for example COM2.

<snapshot> is the name of the game file, so a full example could be:

 zxtrans -s COM2 -b 19200 –i miner.szx

Press enter and if all goes well the game should be squirted across the serial cable and begin loading into the Spectrum.

If you get problems, lower the baud rate or use an additional command to switch modes. All of the instructions can be found on the link provided.

You can also try turning off any serial buffers that are set on your PC or setting ZXtrans to byte mode. Again full instructions on the web-site.

Using this method you can upload Jetpac (9k in SZX format) in around 30 seconds.

NOTE:

Some Spectrums just will not work using these methods. There were a few people who threw comments about, trying for some reason to blame me because they said these options did not work for them.

Having tested on four different machines, only three of them actually loaded games using OTLA, K7ZX or ZXtrans.

I found the Plus machines to give better results too.
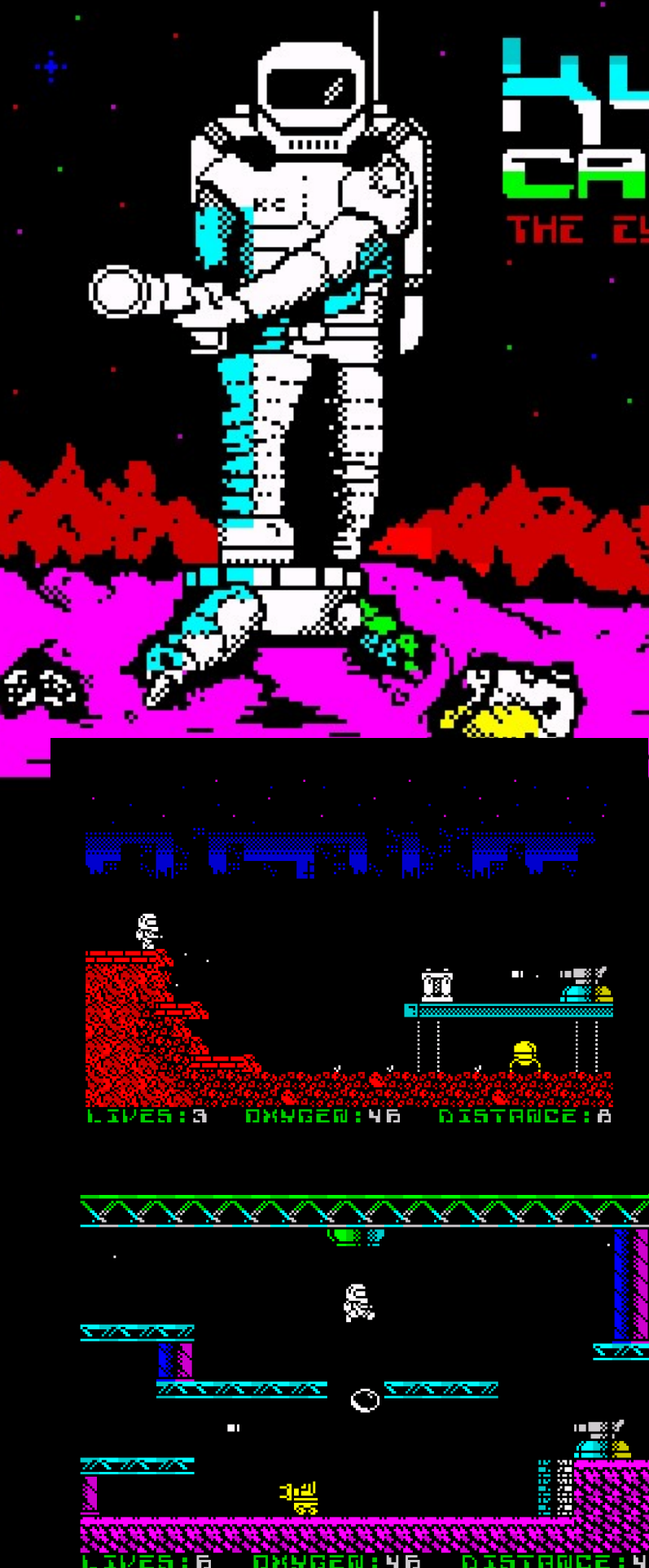
KYD CADET
THE EYEBURX PLEE

Paul Jenkinson 2014

Kyd Cadet 3 – the Eyeburx Plee is the third instalment of the Kyd Cadet series. This is the second attempt to complete the trilogy, the original third game was a platformer, and was about 80% complete when I abandoned it nearly a year ago. This game rose from its ashes and changes the game-play into more of a shooter in the style of Exolon.

The story goes that after some initial probing our hero discovers a plot to take over the galaxy by the destruction-happy Driodand race. More than that though, he discover the attack is imminent, and is being controlled from a central computer on the Droidand's home planet.

With no time to report back, he heads off to take up the challenge, collecting a light weight pulse rifle on the way. Landing on the planet he is immediately besieged by Droidand robots but he must succeed in this new, very dangerous mission.

Oxygen is scarce, and Kyd only has a short supply. Luckily there are oxygen pods scattered around that can be used to re-fill his tanks.

You control Kyd as he moves left to right across various terrains, avoiding and shooting aliens as he nears the final battle.

There are acid bubbles, meteorites, rogue droids and enemy fighters to content with, not to mention the laser cannon emplacements... it's action all the way...

The difficulty if just above average I'd say, at least that's what I planned but there are times when I struggle to complete it myself, hopefully giving seasoned gamers a nice challenge. There are 34 screens to complete, the last one having a boss that needs several shots to destroy.

Graphics are well defined and colourful, and sound is adequate, but goes with the gameplay quite well.

Give this a try.

GUARDIAN

PSS 1983
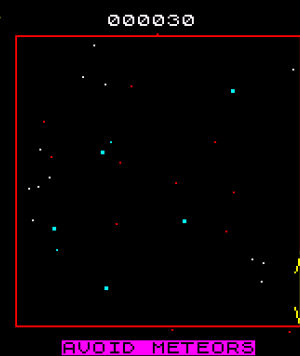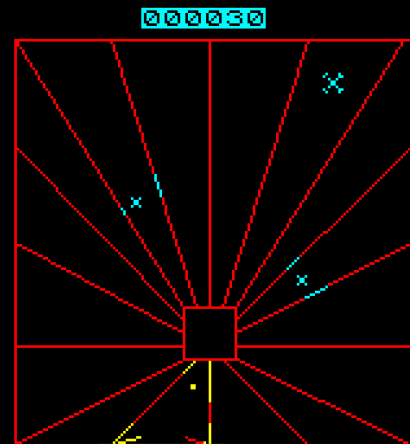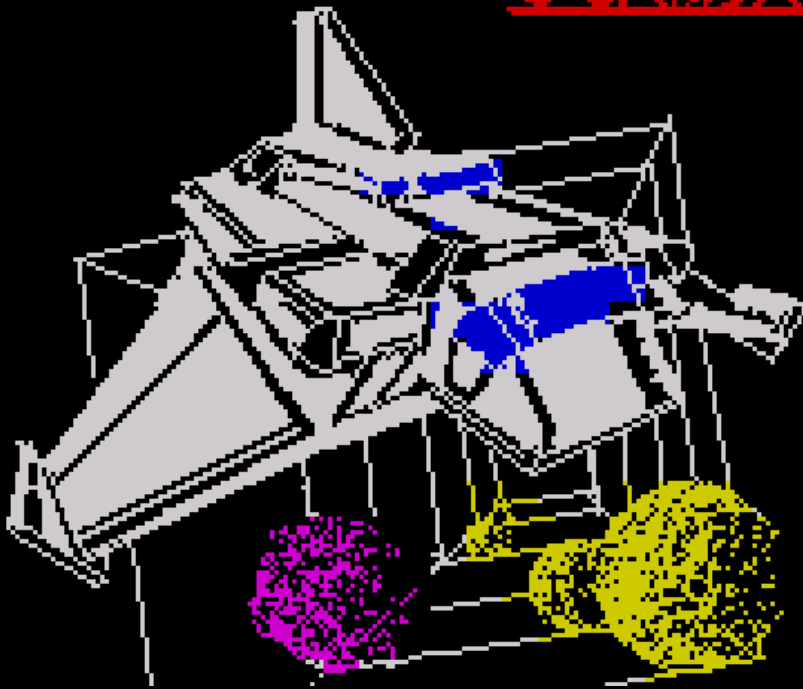
There isn't any story to this game, just a few brief lines about avoiding strangely named aliens such as Trackers, Swirls and Snarks. If you hadn't guessed by the cover or loading screen, it's a clone of the classic arcade game Tempest that falls short in many ways.

The first thing you notice is the speed of the player, it's far faster than the arcade, making it difficult to be accurate. Considering you also don't have the control method used on the arcade, this causes issues before you even get into the game.

The idea is to destroy all of the aliens as they move towards you in the various shaped tunnels. You have two Star Smashers, which when triggered kill everything currently in the tunnel accompanied by a nice graphical and audio effect.

Once past the first level and the game moves away from the trusted and loved gameplay and takes us into a useless dodging level. Here you simply move around dodging the asteroids. This is quite tricky due to the speed of the player, and more often than not I ended up moving into an asteroid rather than avoiding it. If you survive this, then it's back to the familiar tunnels again.

The arcade version gives you different shaped tunnels, but here we get just a square one, which limits gameplay somewhat.

The graphics a smooth enough but the aliens are small and not animated and are sometimes difficult to see.


Sound is quite good for an early arcade clone with various zaps, explosions and star smasher effect.

Control is responsive, but the movement is just too fast, and this spoils what otherwise could have been a good game. It has good gameplay, but all too often it ends in frustration as you hurtle into an alien because of the speed.

If you like Tempest – give it a try, otherwise I think you may find it too frustrating…
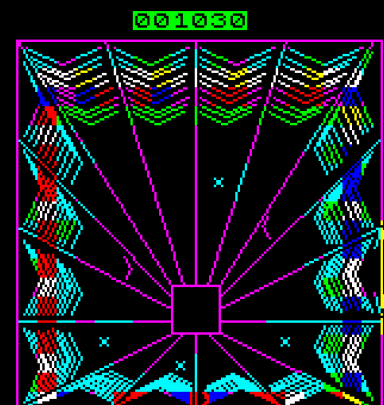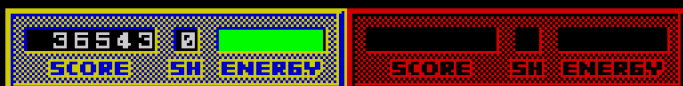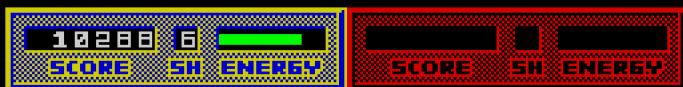
Blasteroids was released in the arcades by Atari in 1987, and was a sequel to the popular Asteroids game. For this release though, 8 years after its predecessor, all of the game elements have been upgraded.

The vector graphics have been replaced by colour sprites, the sound has been boosted with some great effects, and the game play given a makeover, but the core asteroid blasting thankfully remains.

Added elements include three ship types, limited fuel, different regions, motherships, different asteroids types, power-ups, multiplayer and boss battles. A lot to squeeze into the Spectrum.

The Spectrum version was developed by Image Works in 1989 and has all of the arcade features, which is great achievement. The graphics and sound have obviously been toned down to suite the Sinclair machine, but everything is very familiar and works well.

Once in a sector you have to clear all of the asteroids out before you can move on. Here we are in very familiar territory. The ship is controlled in the same manner as Asteroids, rotate left or right, thrust and fire.

Some asteroids are different colours which indicates they are hiding something. If they are destroyed, they drop whatever it is and this can then be collected. Magenta asteroids hold replenishment for your energy.

Your energy is used whenever you thrust or hit an asteroid, so these are important. In later sectors you will meet saucers, destroying these will leave behind shields that

can be used. You also get homing ships that head straight for you. These have to be taken out quickly or they soon sap your energy. Once all the asteroids are clear, a warp pad arrives to whisk you off to the next rock filled sector.

You can choose which sector to go to next, and there are indications of what lies in wait. As the game progresses there are more and more things to destroy you, and adversely, more and more things to collect and use.

The graphics are nice and smooth but don't have the colour of the arcade. This is to be expected I suppose, but they are well drawn and move really well. Sound is a bit of a let-down. You have a weak firing sound and an un-impressive explosion sound. This lets the game down I think.

The backgrounds of the arcade are mimicked using dots, which look OK, but don't add much to the game, which is, really good. Playability is great, accurate controls, which can be keyboard or joystick, work well, and the whole experience is close to the arcade.

Once you clear all of the sectors, you head off into a boss battle, which is pretty tricky. Most of the time you are bounced around the screen with little chance to correct your movement. I just kept firing and hoped for the best.

I also got a ship upgrade, which made it larger, which in turn made it more difficult to avoid things.

I like this game... I played it for ages and it certainly makes up for the lack of poor Asteroids clones on the Spectrum.

Highly recommended then... give it a go...
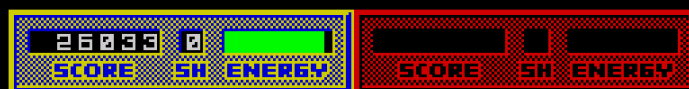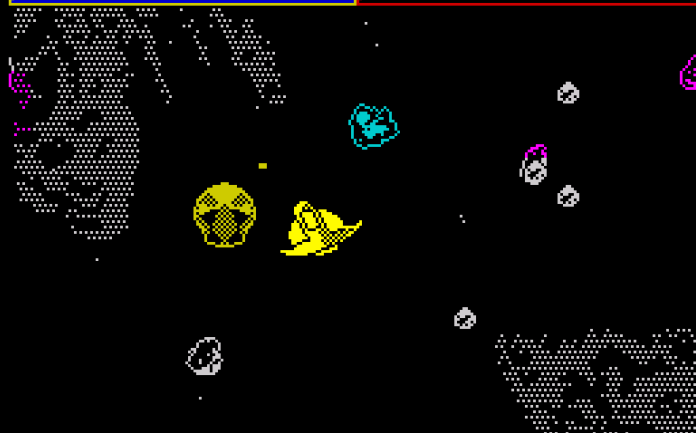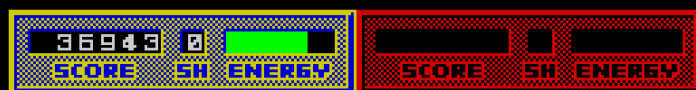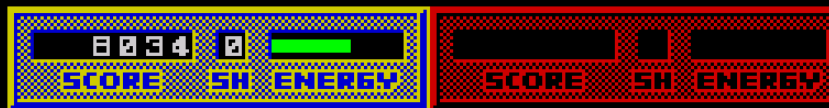
Gremlin Graphics 1987

Deflektor is a puzzle game based on an original idea. Your task is to guide a laser beam from the laser gun to the receiver. It may sound easy, but it's not.

The receiver is blocked by the barrier and to remove it all nodes must be destroyed with laser beam. Positions of gun and receiver are fixed and can't be changed. The only way to change the direction of laser beam is to use the mirrors. You can do it with the pointer - place it over the top of a mirror, hold down the fire button and move left or right to rotate it.

There are also other things on the screen. Some of them, like polarisers and fibre optics, can help you but others, like mines and moving gremlins, are dangerous.

There are 60 levels in Deflektor. You have a time limit to complete each level but it's not the only challenge. You must also avoid directing the laser beam onto mines or back to the gun because it makes the laser to overload and explode. When it happens you lose a life.

Gremlins are very annoying because they can change the position of a mirror and direct the laser beam on a mine. If that happens you probably won't have enough time to react before the explosion. Fortunately you can eliminate gremlins by placing the pointer over them and pressing fire.

You can try 3 times to complete each level. There are no passwords, so when the game is over you have to start from level 1.

Graphics in Deflektor are quite simple but clear. Sound consist of music at the beginning and in-game effects. Both are played by beeper and are of good quality.

Difficulty level is high because it's very easy to lose a life. It seems almost impossible to complete this game without POKEs or saving snapshots.

I can recommend Deflektor only if you like fast thinking games and can save your progress.

Review by Piotr "PopoCop" Szymanski
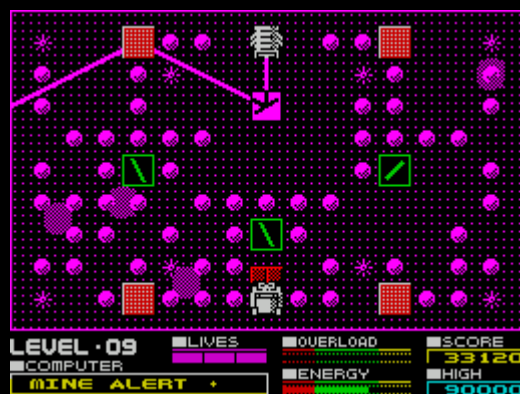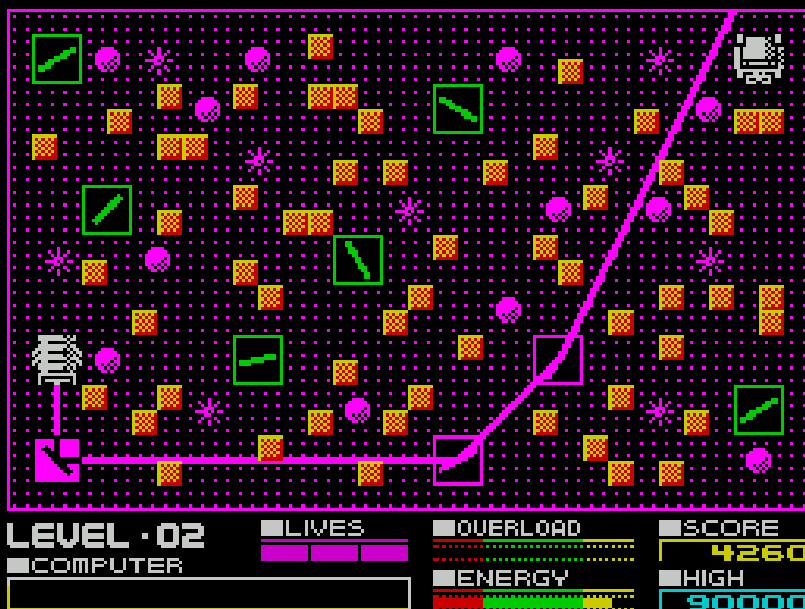
HUNCHBACK

Ocean 1984

Hunchback was released in the arcade by Century Electronics in 1983, and with its simplistic style and gameplay, made it an ideal candidate for home conversion. The idea was simple, run along the top of the wall, avoiding various objects and rescue Esmeralda. Things were made tricky due to a guard that climbed the wall after you, and once he reached the top, he would chase after you with a burning torch. Other obstacles included fireballs, arrows, guards and fire pits.

The Spectrum version was released by Ocean in 1984 and follows the same basic gameplay although it does not feature the second segment of the arcade game where the hunchback enters the bell tower, this section was put into Ocean's follow up game Hunchback 2. There is also no animated intro like the arcade be we get a nice rendition of the Teddy Bear's Picknick before the game begins.

The graphics are larger than the arcade, and move quite well, and rumour has it that the game was originally going to be Robin Hood, hence the green colour.

The first level is fairly easy, just jump over the fireballs. The second level is a real pain to do, and hunchy has to swing across a fire pit. Judging the rope swing is very difficult and has to be almost pixel perfect. This section is much harder than the arcade version, where the rope swings were quite easy to do.

Once past this we have an empty battlement to jump across, this is quite easy as long as you get close to the edge of wall before jumping, but again you have to almost pixel perfect... very frustrating.

Next comes the guards and their pointy sticks, and so it goes on. The levels mimic the arcade, apart from the bell tower sequence as mentioned earlier, but the gameplay is a little harder in my opinion.

Control is simple, left, right and jump and can be via keyboard or various joysticks. Sound is bit thin, but covers all the basics like running and jumping, just like the arcade. There is no emulated voice when your hunchback plummets to his death like the arcade unless you use a Currah speech unit – but that didn't seem to work.

I could have done without the tune every time you started after losing a life or changing levels though. This got very irritating due to the numerous times poor Hunchy fell to his death. Even with infinite lives the rope sections were annoying..

Overall then, not a bad conversion by Ocean, and if you can work out how to do the rope sections, there are still plenty of another challenges to get past and this will keep you busy for quite some time but it's not easy and can soon frustrate.

PROGRESS STOPPED

UNFINISHED GAMES ON MY HARD DRIVE

Some of you may recall a small segment in the Spectrum Show Magazine issue 1 entitled Games That Never Made It. Here I wrote about a game called Convoy Protector that I had almost completed when a problem arose with specific coding in Arcade Games Designer.

This is not the only game never to make it though, and my hard drive is littered with numerous attempts to put together a new game.

Some never got past a few screens, some not even that far, others progressed to five or six screens and a very few nearly made it.

People who purchased the series 1 DVD would have been treated to a walk though of many of them. Since then many others have been started, and some older ones have been found in obscure folders or on backup CDs.

Many game developers will recognise this phenomena, with bits code scattered across various media and game ideas strewn about to be forgotten sometimes for years.

Why did they never get completed?

Let's take a look at a few examples and why they were abandoned.

GAME TITLE: Kyd Cadet 3 (attempt 1)
STYLE: Platform
PERCENT COMPLETE: 80%
NOTES:

This was to be the third instalment of the Kyd Cadet series and had the full title of Kyd Cadet 3 and The Mega-Bee.

The idea was to get into the Mega-Bee hive and plant explosives that you had collected on the way. Once planted you had a time limit to get out, but some of the tunnels would be closed off.

This closing of tunnel caused problems so the game was halted. Some of the new mechanics were used in Antiquity Jones like the rope swing.
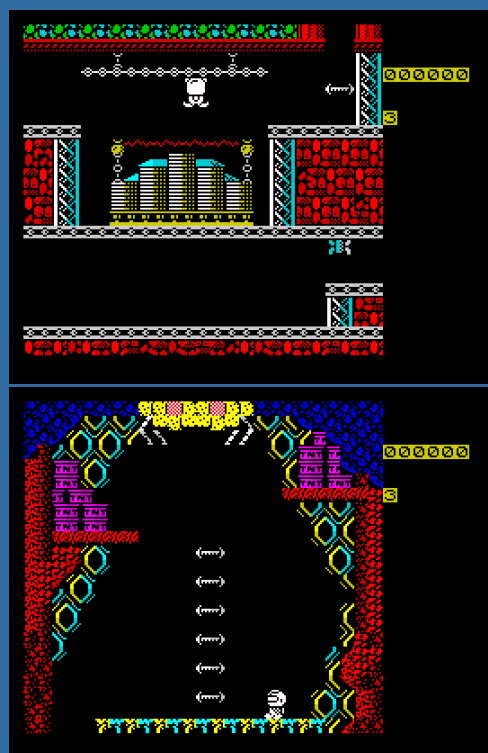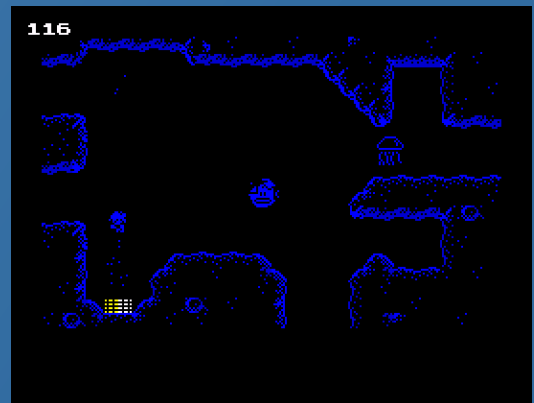
GAME TITLE: Sub Rescue
STYLE: Underwater Rescue
PERCENT COMPLETE: 20%
NOTES:

I wanted to do a game with blue / black graphics to create an atmosphere, and I quickly put together this little game.

You have to rescue trapped divers avoiding falling rocks, killer jellyfish and rampant mining equipment. You had a limited supply of oxygen too, so had to either collect tanks found within the caves or return to the surface.

The game was too much like Scuba Dive in the end, so I saw little point in spending any more time on it.

GAME TITLE: Spinner
STYLE: Shooting Rescue
PERCENT COMPLETE: 40%
NOTES:

I had high hopes for this game. It featured many things I had been experimenting with like inertia and switches that opened and closed force fields in different parts of the map.

I lost interest at some point after getting frustrated trying to work out what each switch did and how it would affect the map!


GAME TITLE: Daz
STYLE: Isometric Rescue
PERCENT COMPLETE: 40%
NOTES:

Isometric games with AGD!! It was a challenge that very nearly worked. Playing a young boy named Daz, you had to rescue your friends from an abandoned mine using dynamite to blow away rocks and other blockages.

I used repeating rooms to make the map bigger too.

The movement was tricky and trying to line up to the doors was a nightmare. I got the mechanics about 90% done, but it was just too much work and things were not going to plan.
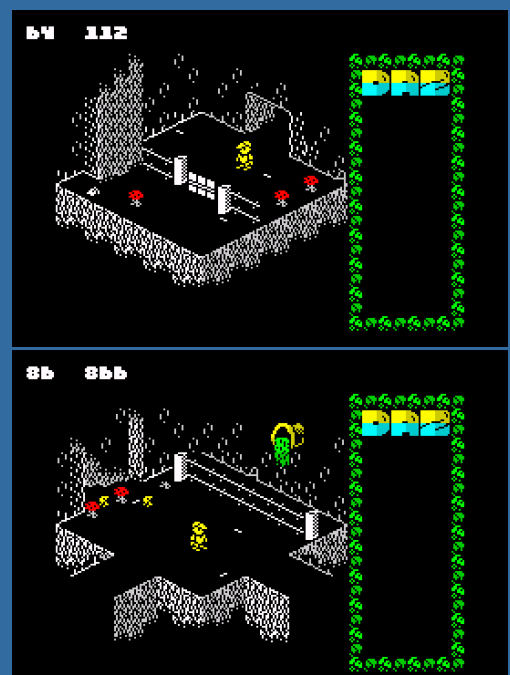
XANTHIUS

Players 1987

Xanthius is a bit of a curious game and is listed on Word Of Spectrum as a shoot-em-up, but it certainly isn't that, in fact there is no shooting at all. The game is more of a maze, exploration and strategy platform game.

The story goes that a small Protopod maintenance droid has been sent to repair Atmosphere Processing Stations on the planet Xanthius. These have malfunctioned and need spare parts to get them back up and running.

The game's instructions are not very explicit about what you have to do or how to do it, so it took me a while to work out the game mechanics, and even now I am not sure about a few aspects of the game.

You control the protodriod that can move around and jump. The actual physics are strange, but once you get used to them, you can take advantage of a few glitches in the game, or maybe they are supposed to be features, I'm not sure.. The programmers tried to put in some kind of intelligence for the droids standing and collision, so that it can automatically move over things like plants or animal. This also means the moving platforms drag the droid onto them, and in some cases, you can move through solid walls if you position the droid right.

So, what do you have to do...

Searching the planet you will soon discover the APS units. You can get to them by beaming up using the beam from the platform beneath, or by just standing on top of them. Once there, you press the A key to login. Here you can get a reports on what is broken.

Before you can repair these however, you have to shut them down, and you must have enough parts to fix them or you can't turn them back on, leaving them off will degrade the atmosphere and cause all kinds of badness!

So, first you deactivate them, then repair each section, then reactivate them. You have to do this to all of the APSs to complete the game - or at least that's the idea. Under some circumstances I found the game presenting me the completion message after repairing only 5 of the 15 of them.

You can also drain or charge these unit, again when standing on top of them, pressing the J or K keys will make the associated pointers in the panel at the top of the screen move. I am not sure why this has to be done, or what affect it has on anything. I presume you have to keep them from losing charge or having too much!
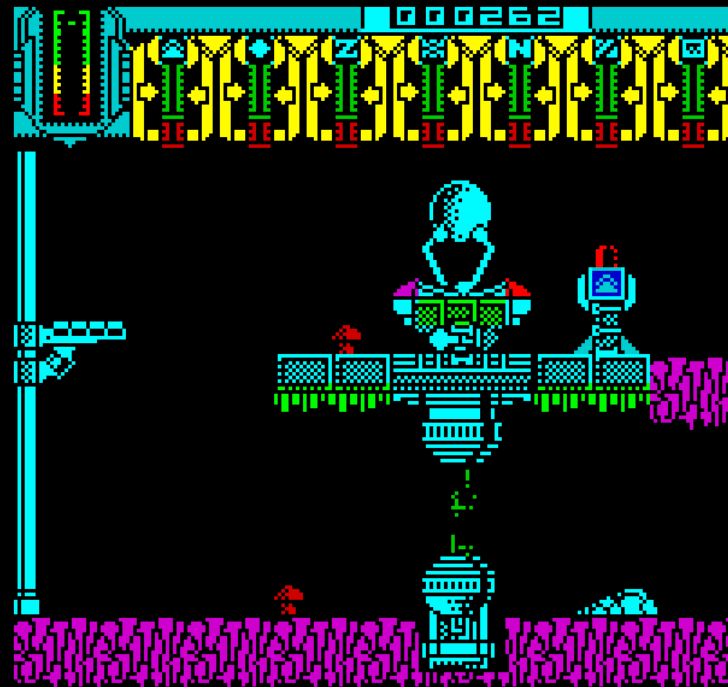
At some stage you will run out of parts as you can only carry a set number, and you can order more by connecting to the main generator. Now, the thing is, you can only order more parts when you have none left, so at some stage you are going to have to leave at least one APSs offline, so there is a bit of strategy here.

The best policy is to leave the ones closest to the generator until you have only a few parts left, so you can quickly get more without leaving the units offline for too long.

Your droid also has an energy bar which is top right, and this drains if hit collides with certain things. Also, some of the creatures on the planet can replenish it.

One weird thing is that you can jump onto plants and crush them. This doesn't seem to have any use at all, but does increase you score.

Back to the game and the glitch. When playing the game you can see how your droid can slide up the sides of platform as the AI fights to keep it on the level, and in one place you can actually ascend through the pipes. This is just below the generator and I don't know if this is a bug or not, but it certainly helps the game.

The graphics are nice and smooth, colourful and very well drawn. The main sprite does bob about a lot and I think this is linked to the semi-intelligence mentioned earlier. Other than that though it is well animated and easy to control.

Sound is a bit of a let-down, with the best effects being used for the repair sequences. Normal game play, when walking about is done in near silence.

Difficulty wise, it's average, but the gameplay is long and laborious, and it doesn't help that the instructions are so vague. The game concept is good, and I spent a good few hours playing it, that is, after I finally figured out what was going on.

Overall then, not a bad game if you like platformers with a bit of strategy.

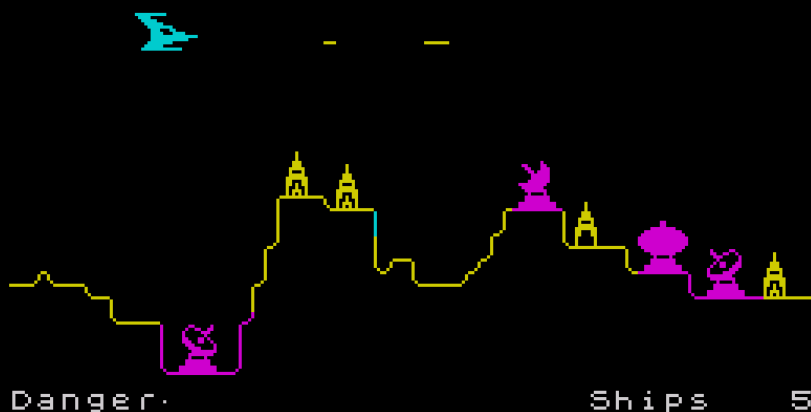Why not give it a try.. now that you know how to play it...
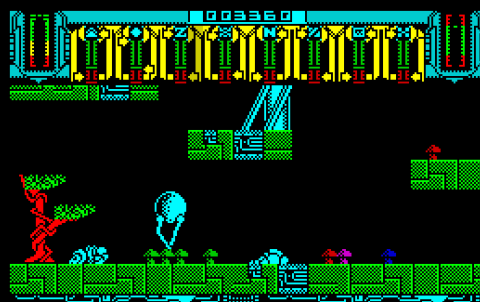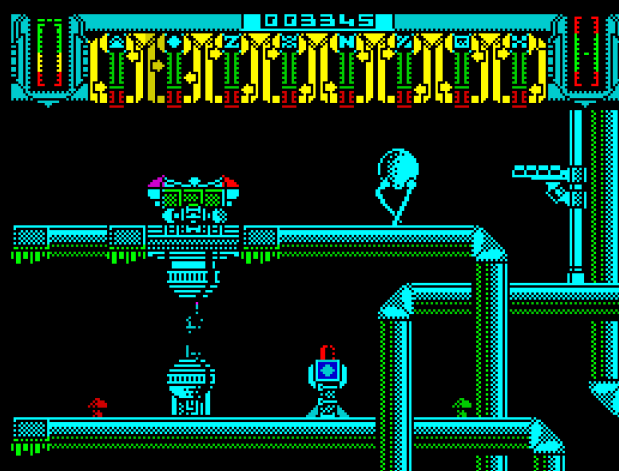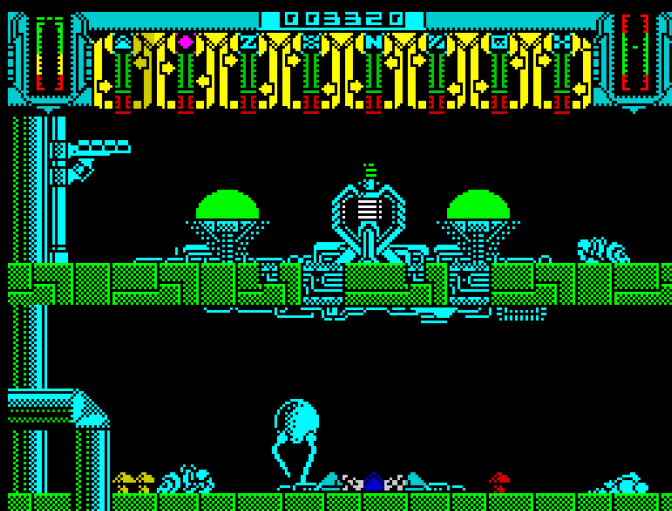
Stage 1. Player -1- Score   50

Melbourne House 1983

Get past this level and its back into the caves, but this time there are flying aliens out to get you, as well as the missiles.

Each level has a different colour with the final stage, the bomb run, being red. Here you have to drop bombs on the enemy base to destroy it, which is very tricky and requires precision...

The sound is great, with a nice engine sound and suitable firing, explosion and bomb sounds.

The control could have been improved but I think it's a good compromise considering the number of buttons required.

Danger·   Ships   5

Penetrator was released by Melbourne House in 1983, and is probably the best Spectrum version of the arcade classic Scramble.

Following the levels of the arcade game, with a few minor differences, this really is a great game from the start. There are radar stations to destroy and missiles to avoid. The game instructions say that leaving radar stations will increase the accuracy of the missiles, but this is a claim that is difficult to prove.

The graphics are wireframe, but move smoothly, and the pace is just about right to give the player a challenging game but at the same time not making things too easy.

The next level soon arrives and we now find ourselves in the cave system. Here the roof now becomes yet another obstacle. There are no meteors like the arcade version, and this is a bit of a letdown, but this level is still tricky to beat.

Level 3 and we enter the city. Here we get very little space to manoeuvre and your piloting skills are tested to the max.

The thrust key doubles up as a fire key, but this means each time you fire, your ship moves forward, something you have to keep in mind in tight situations.

The traditional QAOP SPACE is used, with space being used to drop bombs.

You can also use a Kempston joystick and if you do

Stage 2. Player -1- Score   720

Danger··········   Ships   5

the same mechanism is in place, meaning to fire you have to continually poke the joystick to the right.

Control is very crisp and it needs to be in these later levels, and playability is spot on, you always want to go back and have another go.

If you do manage it, you are treated to a very long firework display followed by a tune. and extra points,   then it's back for another run through..

The game has one final feature that really did set it apart from other games, a level designer.
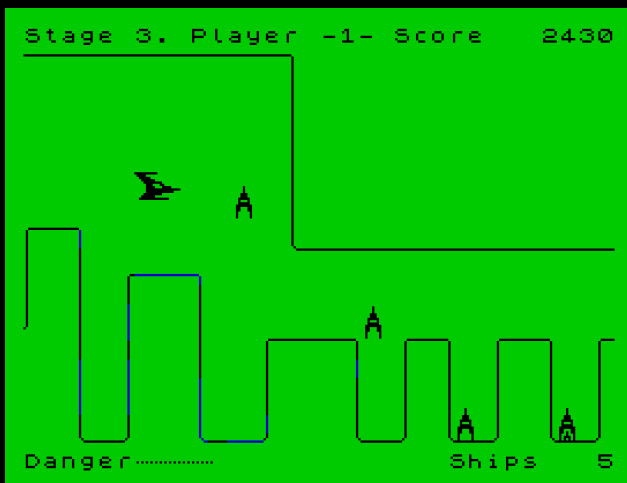
The Level Designer

Built into the game is a full level designer that allows you to easily create landscapes, place missiles and radar stations, and test your creations.

You move a cursor around and plot top or bottom levels, with the missiles and radar stations snapping into place. You can remove or add more to make you levels easier or harder based on your preference.

Once complete, you can then save out the levels and give them to your friends to load in as long as they have the game of course.

This additional feature gave the gave extra shelf life and I'm surprised Melbourne House didn't run a competition for best user designed levels. They could have released them on a separate tape extending the game even further. this could have been a forerunner to DLC.

So, to sum up.. this is a great game that gives you that arcade feeling on your Spectrum. Top notch gameplay and the level designer is cream on the cake.

Brilliant.

THE SILLY BIT

Adverts that are odd, strange or just don't make sense!

How is this working?

Your Speccy is not even plugged in!

What witchcraft is this...

That's right.. Keep looking at the screen while my dragon creeps up on you...

Quack-Shot!

Creative Sparks 1984

At last, a job where you can sit back and relax. After all, what could be more peaceful than being a night-watchman at a toy factory? Unfortunately your employer failed to mention one tiny detail - the rampaging toys that come alive at night and try to kill you. Although they don't so much try, as succeed – over and over again – as surviving Quackshot, or even getting past the first few levels, is no easy task.

Your ultimate aim is to get through the night in one piece, but to do so you will need to navigate 16 mazes of increasing complexity, while fending off all manner of objects bent on your destruction. To make things more complicated there are locked doors barring your way, including at least one always blocking access to the large exit gate at the end of each level, for which you will need to have picked up a key.

Fortunately you are not entirely defenceless and have what is referred to as a "stun gun", although it doesn't seem to stun the toys so much as blow them into little pieces. You also have a "duckbuster bomb" (read: smart bomb) that destroys all enemies on screen, although you have to use this sparingly as you only get one at certain times (each new life or level, and when you unlock a door).

There is also a time limit that ticks down from 99, but unusually you do not immediately lose a life when it hits zero. Instead, for some bizarre reason, you lose the ability to shoot! It's tough enough to stay alive with the gun, but literally impossible to move far without. The real problem lies with the fact that the time only resets to 99 at the start of a level, not when you lose a life, so it's pretty much game over if you don't get a move on.
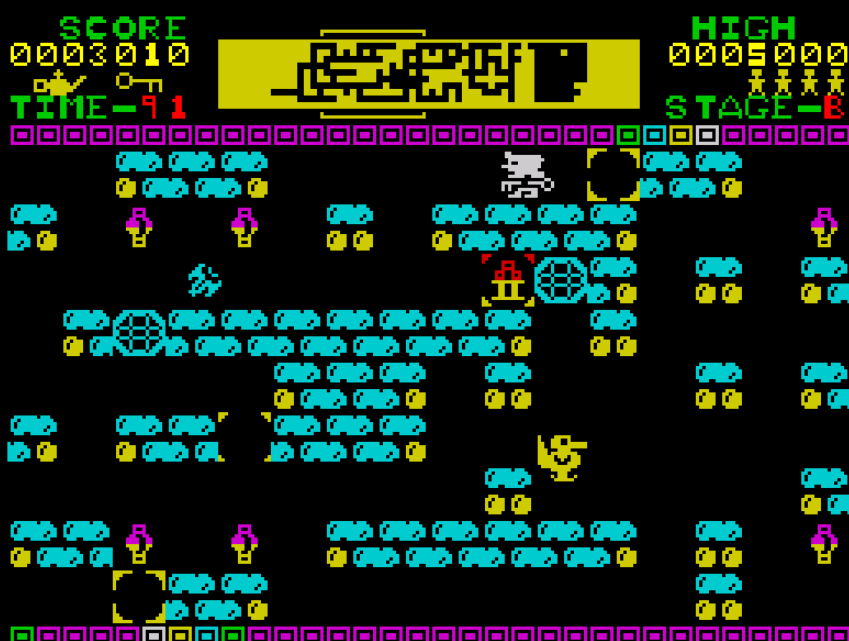
As you progress through each level, which are always horizontal and scroll from left to right, you will encounter various treasures that can be picked up to boost your score. This often comes at a cost because their awkward location can result in the loss of a life should you be tempted to go for them. Also of use are teleports that take you from one part of a level to another – just make sure the area is clear at your destination!

Rogue toys spawn from grates dotted about each level, which makes going near them a nerve-wracking affair. From level 2 onwards, your task is made considerably harder by the presence of a new toy out for your blood in the form of a heat seeking axe (and different objects later). Homing in on you is bad enough, but it's also much faster than anything else – especially you – so shooting (or smart bombing) it early is your only chance. If it catches you in an open area then death is pretty much guaranteed.

Each maze is colourful, with a good variety of toys that are nicely drawn and have simple but effective animations. Movement is fluid, and there is no slow down even with a lot of activity on screen. The scrolling is done in blocks when you approach the edge of the screen, and although not super fast is quick enough not to unduly distract from the action. The top panel contains the usual information, but also displays a map of the whole level – useful to see if the path you are exploring leads to a dead end!

The controls are very responsive, which is essential for this kind of game, although using a keyboard is recommended because of the necessity to use the smart bomb. With a joystick you can only shoot and it's a shame an alternative method for the bomb wasn't implemented, such as a quick double tap of the fire button.

Sound is plentiful, with nice effects for everything from toys appearing to using a teleport. Short tunes play when an object is collected, with longer ones at the start and end of each level. The longer tunes eventually get a bit tiresome, but they are seldom heard so it's only a very minor complaint.
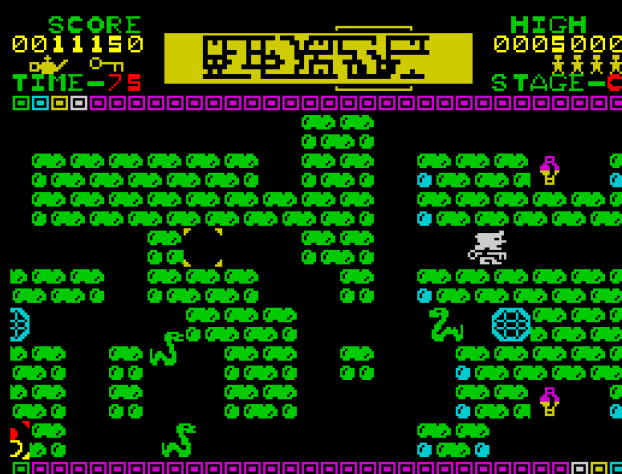
The major problem with Quackshot is, as you have probably realised by now, the extreme difficulty. This mainly results from two areas. Firstly, the collision from your shooting can be a bit flaky. Your gunfire is a thin broken line (reminiscent of the classic arcade game Defender) simultaneously projected to the left and right of your character. If you fire when you are close to an enemy, which you often are, the chances of getting a kill are literally a bit hit and miss. An arguably bigger challenge is not being able to fire up or down, despite toys frequently coming at you from those directions. This leads to situations where you are trapped, unless you happen to have a smart bomb.

Secondly, and this something that is only exaggerated by issues with firing, is the introduction of the fast paced heat seeking toy. Appearing from such an early level creates a large spike in the difficulty level that you never truly recover from, although you gradually develop strategies to minimise their lethalness.

If you can cope with the brutal difficulty, and enjoy arcade maze games, Quackshot comes thoroughly recommended. Most people will never see beyond the first few levels, but that doesn't mean it's not a lot of (occasionally frustrating) fun trying. As a side note, Quackshot is an unofficial remake of the 1982 arcade game Tutankham (by Stern/Konami), but set in a toy factory instead of King Tut's tomb!
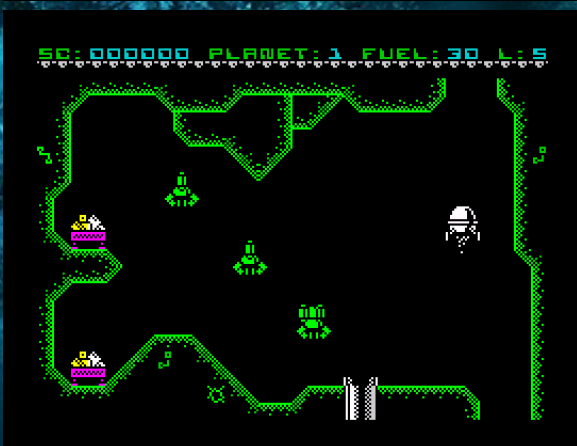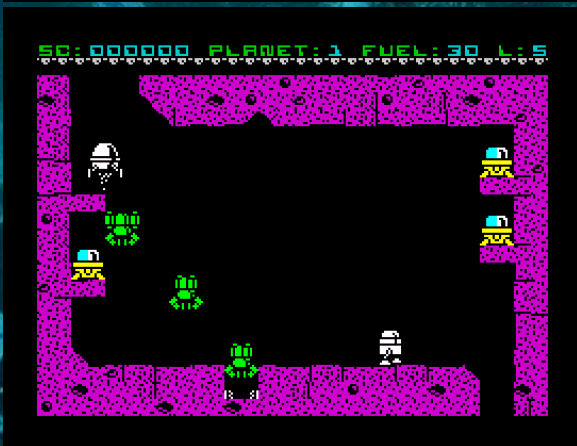
Review by Dion Guy

COMING SOON

DEEP CORE RAIDER
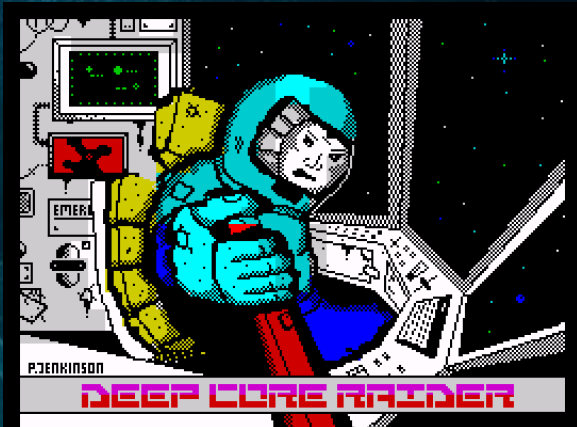
FIVE PLANETS

GRAVITY EFFECTS

CORPORATE DEFENCE SYSTEM

SMOOTH MOVEMENT

NARROW PASSAGES

ARE YOU GOOD
ENOUGH?

From the creator of Antiquity Jones